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Walt Whitman, 1887.

WALT WHITMAN

BY

WILLIAM CLARKE, M.A.

WITH A PORTRAIT

London
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PREFACE.

THIS little book is written as an exposition rather than as a criticism of the works of Walt Whitman. Nevertheless, some critical considerations have been introduced. The first section must not be taken as in any sense a biography of Whitman, but merely as an attempt to pourtray his personality, and to set forth the varied influences which moulded his life. For biography, the reader is referred to the work of Dr. Bucke, and to the *Specimen Days and Collects*, either as published in 1883 by Wilson & M'Cormick of Glasgow, or in the Camelot series. The edition of *Leaves of Grass*, quoted from in the text, is the "Author's Copyright Edition" of 1881. The little poem at the end, "Death's Valley," was written by Whitman to accompany a reproduction of the painting by Mr. George Inness, "The Valley of the Shadow of Death." The five sections into which this work is divided have reference respectively to Whitman's personality, his relations to and message for America, his art, his belief about the nature of democracy, and his *ultimate spiritual creed.*

"I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me.
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue."

"Song of Myself," from *Leaves of Grass.*

"Well, *he* looks like a MAN!"—*President Lincoln's* comment on seeing Whitman.

CONTENTS.

Chap.		Page
I.	HIS PERSONALITY	1
II.	HIS MESSAGE TO AMERICA	21
III.	HIS ART	50
IV.	HIS DEMOCRACY	79
V.	HIS SPIRITUAL CREED	101

WALT WHITMAN.

I.—HIS PERSONALITY.

THOSE who regard Whitman as being the most representative Bard of Democracy, of its innermost ideas, of its moving forces, of its hopes and destiny, must find an interest in tracing the early influences which helped to mould the poet's body and character. The modern scientific doctrine of the effect of environment is enforced and enlarged by Whitman himself; for he sees not only in social circumstances, in political constitutions, and in daily human contact, but in the earth and sky, the rivers and trees, silent influences which pass into man's being and affect his whole future. As Wordsworth found "beauty born of murmuring sound" passing into Lucy's face, so does Whitman discover "persons, substances, beasts, the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands" all contributing their elements to form the spiritual life of man. How natural, therefore, that we should turn to Whitman's early life to discover what were those agencies which stamped his nature with their seal.

On his father's side Whitman was of good English stock, possessed of what he terms "the surly English pluck, and there is no tougher or truer, and never was, and never will be."[1] Dr. Bucke tells us that the earliest lineal ancestor of Whitman he is able to trace was born in England about 1560.[2] This person's son sailed from England in 1635, and lived at Milford, Connecticut, whence his son, some time before 1660, passed over to Long Island. At West Hills, in Long Island, the poet's great-grandfather, grandfather, and father lived; and he himself was born there on the 31st May, 1819. Dr. Bucke describes the Whitmans as "a solid, tall, strong-framed, long-lived race of men, moderate of speech, friendly, fond of their land and of horses and cattle, sluggish in their passions, but fearful when once started."[3] Several of them were soldiers under Washington in the Revolutionary War. The poet's father had learnt, as a youth, the carpenter's trade, was a quiet, serious man, fond of children and animals, a good citizen, parent, and neighbour. He did his work so well that some of his frames are said to be still standing as good as ever. The large, quiet personality of his father is traceable throughout Whitman's work; and the hereditary interest in the carpentry is found in the "Song of the Broad Axe."

Whitman's mother was Louisa Van Velsor, of Dutch descent, a woman healthy in body and mind, of cheer-

[1] "Song of Myself."

[2] *Walt Whitman*, by R. M. Bucke, M.D. (M'Kay, *Philadelphia*), p. 13.

[3] *Ibid.*

ful temper, marked spiritual nature, and generous heart. She had been a handsome girl, fond of life in the open air, a daring and spirited rider; so Whitman could boast of himself that he was—

"Well-begotten, and raised by a perfect mother."

His great-grandmother, on the paternal side, lived to a great age, and when left a widow, managed her own farm lands, and herself directed the labour of her slaves, for there were slaves in the colony then. Of his two grandmothers, one was a Quakeress of beautiful character, who probably furnished the poet with that fine picture of a beautiful, aged woman in *Leaves of Grass*:

"Behold a woman!
She looks out from her Quaker cap; her face is
Clearer and more beautiful than the sky.
She sits in an arm-chair under the shaded porch of the farmhouse;
The sun just shines on her old white head.
Her ample gown is of cream-hued linen;
Her grandsons raised the flax, and her grand-daughters spun it with the distaff and the wheel.
The melodious character of the earth,
The finish beyond which philosophy cannot go, and does not wish to go,
The justified mother of men."[1]

The old homestead in which Whitman was born is

[1] "*From Noon to Starry* Night." Leaves of Grass, p. 355.

thus described by Mr. John Burroughs: "The Whitmans, at the beginning of the present century, lived in a long storey-and-a-half farmhouse, hugely timbered, which is still standing. A great smoke-canopied kitchen, with vast hearth and chimney, formed one end of the house. The existence of slavery in New York at that time, and the possession by the family of some twelve or fifteen slaves, house and field servants, gave things quite a patriarchal look. The very young darkies could be seen, a swarm of them, toward sundown, in this kitchen, squatted in a circle on the floor, eating their supper of Indian pudding and milk. In the house, and in food and furniture, all was rude but substantial. No carpets or stoves were known, and no coffee and tea, and sugar only for the women. Rousing wood fires gave both warmth and light on winter nights. Pork, poultry, beef, and all the ordinary vegetables and grains were plentiful. Cider was the men's common drink, and used at meals. The clothes were mainly homespun. Journeys were made by both men and women on horseback. Both sexes laboured with their own hands—the men on the farm, the women in the house and around it. Books were scarce. The annual copy of the almanac was a treat, and was pored over through the long winter evenings. I must not forget to mention that both these families were near enough to the sea to behold it from the high places, and to hear in still hours the roar of the surf; the latter, after a storm, giving a peculiar sound at night. Then all hands, male and female, went *down frequently* on beach and bathing parties, and

the men on practical expeditions for cutting salt hay, and for clamming and fishing."[1] Whitman tells us that "all along the island and its shores" he spent "intervals, many years, all seasons, sometimes riding, sometimes boating, but generally afoot (I was always then a good walker), absorbing fields, shores, marine incidents, characters, the bay-men, farmers, pilots,—always had a plentiful acquaintance with the latter, and with fishermen—went every summer on sailing trips,—always liked the bare sea-beach, south side, and have some of my happiest hours on it to this day." (Written in 1882.) While living in Brooklyn from 1836 to 1850, he tells us, he loved to go to a bare, unfrequented shore, bathe and race up and down the hard sand, declaiming Shakspere and Homer to the surf and sea-gulls by the hour.[2]

The elements which entered into Whitman's life and built up his manhood are now revealed to us, and we see why he exclaims, "Muscle and pluck forever!" Country life, honest labour, simple tastes and rural joys, out-of-door living, the sea with its infinite suggestiveness and perpetual grandeur, the tramp by the shore or through the woods, life in the saddle and on the water, perfect health, the steeping of every sense in the voluptuous beauty of earth—all these things enabled Whitman to be the poet of the body. And the strong ties of home, the deep human sympathies,

[1] Quoted in Whitman's *Specimen Days and Collects, p. 11 (Glasgow, 1883).*

[2] *Ibid, p. 14.*

the manly republican character of his father, the spiritual intuition of his mother, the spirit of peace which brooded like a dove over the simple Quaker homestead—these made him also the friend of man and the poet of the soul.

But Whitman was to go through wider and more complicated experiences than these, or he could not have become Democracy's chosen bard. He was to become printer and journalist, to go freely, as he expresses it, with "powerful, uneducated persons," to sound all the depths of life, good and bad, in a great city, to live day by day with dead and dying in vast army hospitals, to serve the Government as an official, to wander over vast regions of his own vast continent, to discover what the great world is. "He made himself familiar," writes Dr. Bucke, "with all kinds of employments, not by reading trade reports and statistics, but by watching and stopping hours with the workmen (often his intimate friends) at their work. He visited the foundries, shops, rolling mills, slaughter-houses, woollen and cotton factories, shipyards, wharves, and the big carriage and cabinet shops—went to clam-bakes, races, auctions, weddings, sailing and bathing parties, christenings, and all kinds of merry-makings."[1] He knew every New York omnibus-driver, and found them both good comrades and capital materials for study. Indeed, he tells us that the influence of these rough, good-hearted fellows (like the Broadway stage-driver in *To Think of Time*)

[1] *Walt Whitman*, by R. M. Bucke, M.D.

"undoubtedly entered into the gestation of *Leaves of Grass.*"[1] No scene of natural beauty, no "apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchard," no lilac-bush "with every leaf a miracle," no "gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air," no "hurrying-tumbling waves," no "healthy uplands with herby-perfumed breezes" give him greater inspiration than the thronged streets of New York, with the "interminable eyes," with the life of the theatre, bar-room, huge hotel, the saloon of the steamer, the crowded excursion, "Manhattan crowds, with their turbulent musical chorus," the rushing torrent, the never-ceasing roar of modern human life.

He absorbs the influences coming from a gang of stevedores or a crowd of young men from a printing-office as he does these of "the splendid silent sun," so that he can say with truth—

"I have loved the earth, sun, animals, I have despis'd riches;
I have given alms to every one that ask'd, stood up for the stupid and crazy, devoted my income and labour to others,
Hated tyrants, argued not concerning God, had patience and indulgence toward the people, taken off my hat to nothing known or unknown,
Gone freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young, and with the mothers of families,
Read these leaves to myself in the open air, tried them by trees, stars, rivers," etc.[2]

[1] *Specimen Days and Collects*, p. 19.
[2] "*By Blue Ontario's* Shore." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 273.

A hopeless subject this for "city" men, most clergy men, British matrons, organisers of "charity," and a persons who live by routine, and convention, and wh survey life from the inside of a counting-house or stuccoed villa. A great contrast, too, to our literar men, or at least to the majority of them. For liter ture, in Whitman's eyes, is once more vitally assoc ated with life, as it was in the days of the Elizabetha dramatists, of the buoyant Cervantes, of the majesti Dante. It is not a profession, a separate calling, a affair of libraries and literary coteries, but a transcrip from actual contemporary life. It has been suppose that Whitman carried this to the extreme limit c coarseness, and that he has been purposely, and (as were) almost artificially rude in his contempt of cor ventions. This is not, however, the case. Hi manners and breeding have been admitted by all wh were privileged to know him, to be simple, unaffected natural, and gentle. His bearing as man and a author is frankly democratic. He does not breath any hatred or contempt of those who live in greate luxury; he simply prefers his own simple way Scarce a single English contemporary man of letter appears to have thoroughly assimilated this demo cratic spirit, unless we except our noble artist-poet William Morris, printing, designing, testing colour and patterns with his own hands, and speaking to th masses at out-of-door gatherings; and perhaps in lesser degree, Robert Louis Stevenson, in his sylva retreat in Samoa. In other countries Tolstoi's life *most closely* analogous to that of Whitman.

The result of this isolation of our chief writers from actual popular life is unquestionably loss of influence. It may reasonably be suspected whether the popularity of Tennyson's exquisite poetry is much more than middle-class popularity. The average trade unionist probably would somewhat resent Tennyson's attitude to his class were he acquainted with the Laureate's verse. Browning has vigorous popular sympathies, but, with a few exceptional poems, his subtle thought carries him far beyond the slow mind of the British artisan. Arnold's pensive muse attracts only the cultured few. Swinburne's democratic instincts are not much more than skin-deep; indeed his is the aristocratic Pagan republicanism of his powerful master and inspirer, Landor. Spite of the superficially reactionary character of a portion of Wordsworth's poetry, his human instincts are so true, so deep, that we may accept, as Mr. Arnold does, Wordsworth's own verdict concerning his poems: "They will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, and will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier." And Wordsworth had not only communed with the spirit of Nature, but had known love "in huts where poor men lie." But on the whole the peasant-poet, Burns, born of the people and living among them all his life, is still the British democratic bard.

> "Deep in the general heart of men
> His power survives."

And that mighty influence of the Ayrshire plough-

man is surely due to the fact that with him, as with Whitman, literature is not a thing apart, but a transcript of actual daily life; like the Bible, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, Homer, *Don Quixote*, and those verses of Tasso which the Venetian gondoliers used to sing.

> "Out from the heart of Nature rolled
> The burdens of the Bible old."

Whitman's personal appearance is thus described by Thomas A. Gere, an employé of an East River steamboat, who was one of the poet's friends, and who, writing in 1882, paints his hero as he appeared in the years from 1854 to 1860: "Walt's appearance used to attract great attention from the passengers when he came on board the boat. He was quite six feet in height, with the frame of a gladiator, a flowing gray beard mingled with the hairs on his broad, slightly bared chest. In his well-laundried checked shirt-sleeves, with trousers frequently pushed into his boot-legs, his fine head covered with an immense slouched black or light felt hat, he would walk about with a naturally majestic stride, a massive model of ease and independence. I hardly think his style of dress in those days was meant to be eccentric; he was very antagonistic to all show or sham, and I fancy he merely attired himself in what was handy, clean, economical, and comfortable."[1] In Mr. W. D. O'Connor's powerful, albeit too florid "Vindication" of "The Good Gray Poet," dated Washington, 2nd September, 1865, when Whitman was forty-six years

[1] *Walt Whitman*, by R. M. Bucke, M.D., p. 33.

old, we have a fine portrait of the poet as he appeared in his prime: "A man of striking masculine beauty—a poet—powerful and venerable in appearance; large, calm, superbly formed; oftenest clad in the careless, rough, and always picturesque costume of the common people; resembling, and generally taken by strangers for some great mechanic, or stevedore, or seaman, or grand labourer of one kind or another; and passing slowly in this guise, with nonchalant and haughty step along the pavement, with the sunlight and shadows falling around him. The dark sombrero he usually wears was, when I saw him just now, the day being warm, held for the moment in his hand; rich light an artist would have chosen lay upon his uncovered head, majestic, large, Homeric, and sat upon his strong shoulders with the grandeur of ancient sculpture. I marked the countenance, serene, proud, cheerful, florid, grave; the brow seamed with noble wrinkles; the features massive and handsome, with firm blue eyes; the eyebrows and eyelids especially showing that fulness of arch seldom seen save in the antique busts; the flowing hair and fleecy beard, both very gray, and tempering with a look of age the youthful aspect of one who is but forty-five (46?); the simplicity and purity of his dress, cheap and plain, but spotless, from snowy falling collar to burnished boot, and exhaling faint fragrance; the whole form surrounded with manliness as with a nimbus, and breathing, in its perfect health and vigour, the august charm of the strong."[1]

[1] "*The Good* Gray Poet," Bucke, p. 9.

In 1880 Dr. Bucke describes the poet, who paid him a visit in Canada during that year, as looking so much older than he was that persons took him to be seventy or even eighty. Yet, even then, the cheeks were round and smooth, the body, "a delicate but well-marked rose colour"; and it was the white hair and feebleness in walking, due to paralysis, which alone suggested age. He had the keen bodily senses of a perfectly healthy man, almost akin to those of the finest barbarous races. "I believe all the poet's senses are exceptionally acute, his hearing especially so; no sound or modulation of sound perceptible to others escapes him, and he seems to hear many things that to ordinary folk are inaudible. I have heard him speak of hearing the grass grow and the trees coming out in leaf."[1]

His favourite occupations when in his prime of health and vigour were sauntering about either in the streets or among the wild places where nature grew in her strength and beauty. "I loaf and invite my soul," he says, meaning that he absorbs every influence around him and passes on these experiences into his inner being and the spiritual world he has created for himself. He loved the "splendid silent sun," and Mr. Conway relates how he found the bard in the primitive garb of Eden, before even the fig-leaf came into fashion as an article of costume, lying in the sand by the sea-shore, revelling in the light and heat of the sun. He also loved to sing to himself in an undertone (an invariable sign of a happy nature), and to

[1] Bucke, p. 49.

recite poetry. He did not talk much. He was never married, for the reason he gave to Dr. Bucke while the two were enjoying the scenery of the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence: "I suppose the chief reason why I never married must have been an overmastering passion for entire freedom, unconstraint; I had an instinct against forming ties that would bind me." [1]

It is generally known that Whitman had a paralytic seizure several years ago. He was attacked by it in February, 1873, but he had been frequently ill since 1864, when he was taken with malarial fever, induced by years of labour and watching amid the horrible tragedies of the military hospitals at Washington during the Civil War. He has been blamed because, with his splendid physique and professed patriotic devotion, he did not serve in the army. The charge breaks down when it is said that Whitman, brought up in Quaker traditions, held the creed of George Fox, of Garrison, and of Tolstoi. He came not to destroy men's lives but to save them: fighting was not his *métier*. So far as physical courage is concerned, it probably needed less of that commodity to face the Southern bullets and cavalry charges than to serve in a military hospital with all its terrible sights and sounds. There is here no martial music, no *esprit de corps*, no rushing headlong torrent of almost divine madness, no thought of glory to be won, no sudden heroic death nor chance of splendid victory. In place of these elements of the battlefield, there are the

stern, whitewashed walls of the vast ward rising up all round like the array of the sheeted dead; there are the mangled human forms, the broken limbs, the great red gashes, the pools of blood, the cries of agony, the grim instruments of the surgeon's art, and ever and anon the ghastly spectre of Death striking down his victims on every side. Romance, fierce and bloody though it may be, has an inspiration for men on the battlefield; but how many can possess their souls amid the stern realities of the hospital without any adventitious help or charm? Goethe found a positive kind of delight in riding amid the cannon-balls at Argonne, sounding as though composed "of the humming of tops, the gurgling of water, and the whistle of birds." But he could not look upon a wounded object or a dead body without mortal terror. Men are so differently constituted that there is nothing so difficult to affirm or deny as the presence of courage in any given person. If any censure is to be passed on Whitman for not actually taking up arms for the Republic in her hour of trial, let the blame be laid to the charge of a creed which has been held by some of the purest and bravest of men, and not to that of the poet's lack of courage.

Whatever the effect of these years of terrible experience on the poet's body, it cannot be doubted that they gave new life to his soul. For here in these Washington hospitals he must have gazed deep into the very heart's core of supreme pity and human sympathy. He sounded the divine depths of sorrow as *he had earlier* sounded those of joy in nature and of

flushing virile life. How the wounded must have loved the noble heroic figure who came stealing gently to the bed of pain, laying his cool palm softly as a mother on the burning brow! He lived in the utmost simplicity in order that he might have money for the purchase of little articles to give comfort or relief.[1] He is able in after years to recall simply but with conscious joy this time of help given to the sufferer:

"Upon this breast has many a dying soldier lean'd to breathe his last,
This arm, this hand, this voice, have nourish'd, raised, restored,
To life recalling many a prostrate form."[2]

As to Whitman's deep human love for man as man, let the following story told by Mr. W. D. O'Connor suffice to reveal this great quality: "I remember here the anecdote told me by a witness, of his meeting in a by-street in Boston a poor ruffian, one whom he had known well as an innocent child, now a full-grown youth, vicious far beyond his years, flying to Canada from the pursuit of the police, his sin-trampled features bearing marks of the recent bloody brawl in New York, in which, as he supposed, he had killed someone; and having heard his hurried story, freely confided to him, Walt Whitman, separated not from the bad even by his own goodness, with well I know what tender and tranquil feeling for the ruined being,

[1] *Bucke, pp. 36, 37.*
[2] "*By Blue Ontario's* Shore." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 273.

and with a love which makes me think of that love of God which deserts not any creature, quietly at parting, after assisting him from his means, held him for a moment, with his arm around his neck, and, bending to the face, horrible and battered and prematurely old, kissed him on the cheek, and the poor hunted wretch, perhaps for the first time in his low life receiving a token of love and compassion like a touch from beyond the sun, hastened away in deep dejection, sobbing and in tears." [1]

A finishing touch may be imparted to this attempted pourtrayal of Whitman's personality by this account of his appearance so late as the summer of 1890 by an English visitor: "The first thing that struck me was the physical immensity and magnificent proportions of the man, and, next, the picturesque majesty of his presence as a whole. He sat quite erect in a great cane-runged chair, cross-legged, and clad in rough gray clothes, with slippers on his feet, and a shirt of pure white linen with a great wide collar, edged with white lace, the shirt buttoned about midway down his breast, the big lapels of the collar thrown open, the points touching his shoulders, and exposing the upper portion of his hirsute chest. He wore a vest of gray homespun, but it was unbuttoned almost to the bottom. He had no coat on, and his shirt-sleeves were turned up above the elbows, exposing most beautifully shaped arms, and flesh of the most delicate whiteness. Although it was so hot, he did not perspire visibly, while I had to keep mopping my face.

[1] *The Good Gray Poet*, by W. D. O'Connor.

His hands are large and massive, but in perfect proportion to the arms; the fingers long, strong, white, and tapering to a blunt end. . . . But his majesty is concentrated in his head, which is set with leonine grace and dignity upon his broad, square shoulders; and it is almost entirely covered with long, fine, straggling hair, silvery and glistening, pure and white as sunlit snow, rather thin on the top of his high, rounded crown, streaming over and around his large but delicately shaped ears, down the back of his big neck; and, from his pinky-white cheeks and top lip, over the lower part of his face, right down to the middle of his chest, like a cataract of materialised, white, glistening vapour, giving him a most venerable and patriarchal appearance. His high, massive forehead is seamed with wrinkles. His nose is large, strong, broad, and prominent, but beautifully chiselled and proportioned, almost straight, very slightly depressed at the tip, and with deep furrows on each side, running down to the angles of the mouth. The eyebrows are thick and shaggy with strong white hair, very highly arched, and standing a long way above the eyes, which are of a light blue with a tinge of gray, small, rather deeply set, calm, clear, penetrating, and revealing unfathomable depths of tenderness, kindness, and sympathy. . . . The whole face impresses one with a sense of resoluteness, strength, and intellectual power, and yet withal, a winning sweetness, unconquerable radiance, and hopeful joyousness."[1]

[1] *Notes of Visit to Walt Whitman*, by J. Johnston, M.D. *(Bolton, 1890).*

It may be asked whether we are to conceive of Whitman as a cultivated man. On the whole, probably not, in the conventional sense of the word. His early education was that of the American common school, he never went to college, he has himself told us that in libraries he lies "as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead," [1] and his early work in the printing-office prevented him from acquiring what is called "culture." But when we recall the fact that England's supreme poet knew "little Latin and less Greek," that Keats was innocent of classical learning, and that Burns derived his inspiration from beggars and mountain daisies rather than from

> "Thebes or Pelop's line,
> Or the tale of Troy divine,"

we shall not count the absence of a vast array of culture and immense stores of learning as a loss. Indeed we may be reasonably sure that the presence of these would probably have fettered Whitman's peculiar genius. Learning is good for the poet when he knows what to do with it, as in the case of Browning. But on the whole the cultivated New England writers have lost in power and insight what they have gained in knowledge.

But we must not suppose that Whitman had not read a good deal. In Matthew Arnold's sense of the word culture—a knowledge of the best that has been said and thought in the world—we may fairly class

[1] "Calamus."

Whitman among cultured men. We hear much of attempts to collect the "hundred best books," and of speculations as to what one would like to have in the shape of literature were one cast on a desert island. This talk shows a growing sense that the best the world can give us is contained in a few books, and a kind of bewilderment over the immense multitudes of books a cultivated person is supposed to read. Whitman did well in confining himself largely to the world's greatest spiritual products; to the Bible, Shakspere, Homer (in translation), *Don Quixote*, Epictetus. We see, too, from frequent references, that he had made himself familiar with the philosophic ideas of Hegel, and with the writings of Carlyle, Emerson, Tennyson, Arnold, and others of the more significant modern authors. He had read not a little of history and science, and may therefore be called a well-read man. The fancy portrait of an ignorant barbarian with a red shirt, and his boots on the table, must fade away before the vision of the real man, as he has been partly depicted in these pages and in the writings of his friends. We have now a very fair idea of him and of the formative influences which moulded his life. We see in him the genuine democrat of the very highest type, sharing all the feelings of the average man, and yet adding something unique and precious, something that we call genius. Unconventional, powerful, with a healthy rudeness, combined with a delicate refinement, born out of deep human sympathy, and therefore outlasting the mere politeness of society. His figure has in it somewhat of the antique

heroic type, and yet withal a sweet benignity, so blending the Pagan and the Christian elements with a thoroughly new tone—the tone of the New World democrat, who is the peer of anyone, and whose vision sweeps the vast horizon of a mighty continent. We see in him one who has never sold character and intellect in the market, and who has declined and despised the tempting bids which the men of enterprise make to the men of genius. In a land where the "almighty dollar" is a powerful factor, where frivolous Anglomaniacs outvie the elder world in profuse luxury and vulgar ostentation, a land much of whose literature has been mere puny imitation, Whitman has stood out a colossal and commanding figure—original, courageous, solitary, and poor. His own manhood is even greater than anything he has produced; and all that he has produced has flowed forth naturally from the fountain-head of his own humanity.

II.—HIS MESSAGE TO AMERICA.

PROFESSOR LOMBROSO, in his suggestive, but one-sided work, recently translated into English, while admitting that Whitman's poetry "bears the imprint of strange and wild originality," classes the poet among the not altogether sane egotists of genius.[1] And when the poet frankly avows, "I know perfectly well my own egotism," the superficial reader at once accepts Lombroso's estimate. But Whitman is all the time thinking not of his own individuality, but of modern humanity in its actual types, especially as found in America, whose representative he is. "The modern man I sing," exclaims the poet, just as Dante sings the mediæval man. But, whereas in Dante's case, the "mystic, unfathomable song" marked the culmination of a great world-era, Whitman, on the other hand, stands at the birth of a vast modern world, whose future growth he seeks to penetrate. He peers down the "democratic vistas" of the opening age, and discerns afar the great new shapes looming up in the dim distance. It is not of his own personal *ego*, it is of the tidal rush of new virile life on the American continent, that he writes. The "I" constantly sprinkling the pages of *Leaves of Grass* is

[1] *The Man of Genius*, p. 318 (London, 1891).

not the individual but the collective American *Ego*, whose voice he believes himself to be. When he exclaims, "I salute all the inhabitants of the earth," or "I did not know I held so much goodness," he speaks for the modern man of his own country; for he reminds one perpetually that he claims nothing for himself which he does not concede to all. No, it is not egotism, it is the identification of a great individual nature with the spirit and life of modern humanity. He is America's voice; not the voice of transcendental liberalism like Lowell, nor of a softened and humanised Puritanism like Whittier, nor an echo of England and Spain like Irving and Longfellow, but the voice of the average American spread over a vast and still ragged continent, flush with life, energy, and hope. His task is to foreshadow the future of the democratic life there, to announce things to come.

"Fresh come, to a new world indeed, yet long prepared,
I see the genius of the modern, child of the real and ideal,
Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true America, heir of the past so grand,
To build a grander future."[1]

Let us see what Whitman thinks of his own vast country with its new problems so suddenly held up before its people for solution by the sphinx of destiny. Whitman very clearly perceives both sides of the shield, and is as severe in his denunciation of the radical American vices, as he is confident in the

[1] "*Song of the* Redwood-Tree." Leaves of Grass, p. 169.

grand future of "these States." We must note alike the warning voice of condemnation, and the resonant utterance of clear-sighted and sympathetic hope and faith in the people; both of which discover themselves in the essay termed *Democratic Vistas* written in 1868.

To take Whitman first in his Cassandra-like character, we have this powerful and searching diagnosis of America, conceived in the vein of Carlyle: "I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us. The underlying principles of the States are not honestly believed in (for all this hectic glow, and these melodramatic screamings), nor is humanity itself believed in. What penetrating eye does not everywhere see through the mask? The spectacle is appalling. We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout. The men believe not in the women, nor the women in the men. A scornful superciliousness rules in literature. The aim of all the *littérateurs* is to find something to make fun of. A lot of churches, sects, etc., the most dismal phantasms I know, usurp the name of religion. Conversation is a mass of badinage. From deceit in the spirit, the mother of all false deeds, the offspring is already incalculable. An acute and candid person in the revenue department in Washington, who is led by the course of his employment to regularly visit the *cities, north, south*, and west, to investigate frauds, has *talk'd much* with me about his discoveries. The

depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism. In fashionable life, flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism,[1] small aims, or no aims at all, only to kill time. In business (this all-devouring modern word, business), the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field. The best class we show is but a mob of fashionably-dressed speculators and vulgarians. Sure, indeed, behind this fantastic farce, enacted on the visible stage of society, solid things and stupendous labours are to be discovered, existing crudely and going on in the background, to advance and tell themselves in time. Yet the truths are none the less terrible. I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs in materialistic development, products, and in a certain highly-deceptive superficial popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and æsthetic results. In vain do we march with unprecedented strides to empire so colossal, outvying the

[1] Whitman frequently uses this word to denote a man's disbelief in *the higher purposes* of his own life.

antique, beyond Alexander's, beyond the proudest sway of Rome. In vain have we annex'd Texas, California, Alaska, and reach north for Canada and south for Cuba. It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul." [1]

The prose work of Whitman's from which this quotation is taken is intended to be critical; but in *Leaves of Grass* the same note is struck in the lines, "To the States":—

"Who are they as bats and night-dogs askant in the capitol?
What a filthy Presidentiad! (O South, your torrid suns! O North, your arctic freezings!)
Are those really Congressmen? are those the great Judges? is that the President?[2]
Then I will sleep awhile yet, for I see that these States sleep, for reasons." [3]

This stern denunciation may be commended to those who imagine Whitman to be the mere sounder of what he calls a "barbaric yawp," the mere glorifier of crude democracy, the loud-mouthed showman inviting the European peoples generally to step up and see the unrivalled Columbian collection contained within "these States." There is, indeed, far more commonplace optimism in the American versifiers so

[1] "Democratic Vistas," from *Specimen Days and Collects*, p. 210 (*Glasgow*, 1883).

[2] *The Presidencies* of Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan.

[3] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 219.

widely read in England than in either the prose or poetry of Whitman. Indeed, in the older American writers, before the simple agricultural democracy had become a highly complex industrial republic, we can almost hear "the eagles of the Great Republic laugh. Ha, ha!" Whitman, on the contrary, seems, at least in his later writing, to perceive with great clearness the shortcomings of the United States—the superficiality, the ostentation, the vague moral platitudes covering ugly social facts, the imposture connected with the political "game" reduced to its baldest and ugliest feature, the mock piety of the millionaire, the blarney of the politician, the materialism of the business-man, the sensationalism, vulgarity, and all the other surface manifestations of democracy which led M. Rénan to declare that, from the spiritual point of view, a single Italian city, with its art, its history, its background of stormy, intense, individual life outweighed in importance the whole of America.

Mr. Matthew Arnold observed of America that it had solved the political problem, it had solved the social problem, but it had not solved the human problem. By the human problem Mr. Arnold meant a high standard of national life, works of creative genius, a superb and beautiful ideal of manners, of conduct, of faith and aspiration, an ease and grace of living—these things, according to Mr. Arnold, America has not, and few will be found to gainsay him. For a brief period, the nation rose to a height of moral grandeur, when the fabric of her political union was threatened by an immoral and audacious rebellion.

But even during that terrible crisis, impartial history must record that members of Congress did not hesitate to receive bribes for concessions granted to the Union Pacific Railway. But as soon as the Civil War was over came the rush of immigrants, the opening up of the West, and the submergence of the country in a tidal wave of materialism. The last quarter of a century may be said to have been the era of railroad kings, grain-speculators, imported cheap labour, defaulting bank officials, and "machine" politicians. America has lost dignity, has all but dropped the thread of organic union, has become the prey of "rings" and "trusts," dominated by unscrupulous persons with anti-social instincts and aims. The greater part of the civilised world has of course shared in this diseased condition; but America has fared worse than any other nation, and it is only her enormous resources which have prevented the strain from being too acutely felt. And while, doubtless, much work is being done to correct these evil tendencies, that work lacks concentration, and perhaps intelligent direction. The cultured classes, who are apt to view the political and social condition of their country with some degree of disgust, are much farther apart from the "masses" than are the cultivated people in England; and, as a rule, they have no solution to offer. They are too cold, critical, conventional: they represent the moral decorum of Puritanism, with its fervid religious faith all dead. The great middle-class, *larger, more intelligent*, and with a wider sweep than *the English middle-class*, is yet sunk in business

materialism. And the vigorous, alert, clean American workman has been out-numbered by the swarms of poorly-paid labourers from Europe. These varied classes, with the six millions of nominally enfranchised negroes, without sufficient common faith, ideas, purpose, culture, do not furnish the requisite conditions for the solution of the human problem. So far Mr. Arnold is right. But when he contends that America has solved the political and social problems, we must demur; for she has not done even that at present.

Consider the political problem. The United States are bound together by a Federal Constitution, a work of great ingenuity, constructed by one of the most remarkable group of statesmen the modern world has seen, but bearing all the marks of the political ideas of the eighteenth century. It is beginning to be suspected that that Constitution is a very good vessel in fair weather; but that in a serious storm she may become hopelessly water-logged. The people of the United States have had, on the whole, an easy time of it, as compared with the nations of Europe. But it is worth noting that, in the case of the one serious problem which has confronted the American people, their Constitution has broken down. The American Constitution could not solve the problem of American slavery, which had to be submitted to the arbitrament of the sword. *Inter arma silent leges;* and for four years the American Constitution was practically suspended and slavery was first done away with as an act of war. Further, the Constitution provided no means for the settlement of the disputed Presidential election in

1876; and an extra-constitutional tribunal had to be set up, whose decision even now is challenged by half the American people.

We perceive too, that, under this Constitution, the Federal power is constantly encroaching on the supposed political sphere of the various States. Ballot-stations, professedly under State regulations, have been surrounded by Federal troops, and may be so again. The powers and mode of election of the President, the position and functions of the Senate, the powers accorded to the Speaker of the House, are all strongly criticised, to some extent disapproved, by an earnest and able minority. Supposing the directly elected representatives of the people came into rude collision on some vital question of labour, or of organic reform with that "millionaire's club" (as it has been called), the Senate, what a dislocation of the entire political system might not ensue! It must also be assumed that the political problem includes what is the most difficult question of our time, the administration of large cities. How utterly the American system has broken down in this respect, let the constant and disgraceful scandals and incompetence of the city governments of New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, and other places declare. Perhaps the political problem never will be solved; possibly the solution may be in a perpetual process of "becoming" according to the Hegelian conception. Perhaps as soon as we have chopped off one head of the political hydra, another is destined to rear its horrid crest. But how-*ever this may be, it* cannot be averred that America

has more decisively solved the political problem than most of the Western European nations have. Indeed, if there is one country above all others that would appear to have accomplished this feat it is Switzerland.

Turn from the political to the social problem. Has America really solved this? How can this be maintained when it is understood that the American social structure is substantially similar to that of Western Europe. There is no inherent difference between the land system of England and that of the United States; and upon this economic basis the social edifice is reared. The only difference lies in the extent of territory which the United States possess as compared with the British Islands; and that great patrimony has been so rapidly absorbed or wasted that it is calculated by an eminent statistician [1] that, within a quarter of a century there will be no more available land for settlement. Even as it is, the stringent regulations respecting immigrants remind us that the boast of Mr. Lowell that his country's

> "Free latch-string never was drawed in
> Against the poorest child of Adam's kin—"

no longer applies. The capitalist system of America is that of England, only more despotic, ambitious, and less scrupulous. The contests between capitalist and workmen there are more severe and dangerous than those in England. The social contrasts between rich and poor are even more startling than those in

[1] Mr. Giffen.

Europe; for the wealth there is far more rapidly acquired and less readily assimilated. The average rate of wages is not high, and the average individual income is lower than in Great Britain.[1]

Many American millionaires, it is true, give to worthy public causes with lavish hand; but it is also true that more money is extravagantly squandered by rich people than is the case in Europe. In the Old World the majority of the rich are probably still of families sufficiently old to be accustomed to the easy and natural use of immense possessions. But the American millionaire, who is not to the manner born, turns to some bizarre, strained, ostentatious display of luxury in the shape of big, luxurious yachts, acres of foreign paintings, diamonds, fast horses, and other vanities, which he rarely cares for, and which he has rarely time to enjoy, for he is not a man of leisure, but a wealthy drudge of the office, bank, or Stock Exchange. It is impossible to separate social life from economic conditions, for the latter all but invariably constitute the formative mould of the former. The characteristic of social classes is inevitably determined by the constant habit and action of the greater part of the waking day. Thus the poor are mainly employed in competing against one another for a livelihood, while the rich are engaged in competing for a fortune. This fortune does not arise from genuine payment for social services, but from *manipulation of* unearned wealth. This, of course, is

[1] *U. S. Census Returns for* 1880, and Mulhall's Dictionary *of Statistics*, p. 245 (1886).

more or less the character of our present civilisation. It is not claimed that America is peculiar in this respect, but that she shares the worm-eaten social order of Europe, and that she reveals it in a more naked form, unrelieved by the picturesque relics of an earlier form of civilisation. America has, therefore, no more solved the social problem than has Europe; and thus the whole of Mr. Arnold's criticism turns out erroneous. The political and social problems of America are no more really solved than is the human. The ease with which the American people have advanced is due rather to immense stores of material wealth than to anything in the structure of Government or society. The three leading democratic nations of the world, France, Great Britain, and the United States, enjoy (or suffer, if one likes to put it so) much the same kind of political organisation at bottom. The popular vote is recognised as the source of political power; but it is curious that in Great Britain, whose patch-work, time-honoured institutions are the least acceptable to democratic theorists, the people have the closest, most immediate control of the domestic policy.[1] The outward forms differ, the essence is practically the same.

The mass of the American people have not yet awakened to the fact that their social structure is substantially identical with that of Western Europe. It was said of a distinguished parliamentary orator, that

[1] I say domestic purposely, because in foreign matters the English *people* are much more at the mercy of their *Government than* are the French or American.

history for him began with the repeal of the corn laws. For the average American, history is very apt to begin with the 4th July, 1776; and he is apt to think of his country as having started *de novo*—an illusion sustained by the comparatively easy course of American history. Slavery of course was a serious accident; but it was supposed that when that was abolished, all would be smooth sailing, because the country was "free" in some sense in which England is not free. The exaggerated "spread-eagleism" of such a patriot as Mr. Hannibal Chollop, or the Hon. Elijah Pogram is, it is true, rare now; for there is no sane mind that is not impressed by actual, palpable facts. But the notion is still prevalent that America's troubles are superficial and passing, Europe's deep and abiding. It is this notion which produces that easy-going superficial optimism, that resignation to public ineptitude and private tyranny, which can scarcely fail to strike intelligent European visitors to the United States. The "coal barons" form unscrupulous combinations to advance prices and swell dividends; but no one proposes to do anything except a few persons who have just caught the ground-swell of European socialism, and who are regarded as "cranks." Pinkerton detectives shoot down unarmed men and women, and even children—an incident which could not be imagined in England; and it seems to cause but a ripple of mild protest even *from* excellent and kind-hearted people. What is the *explanation of it all?* Probably that the "immortal *principles" of '76* are as much a fetish in America as

those of '89 are in France. "The past is fatal to our party. The French Revolution, I say it with deep conviction, crushes us. It weighs like an incubus upon our hearts, and forbids them to beat. Dazzled by the grandeur of that Titanic struggle, we prostrate ourselves before it even yet." So wrote Mazzini [1] more than half a century ago. His words would not be so true to-day; but they have not wholly lost their meaning. And while fourth of July orations no longer gather huge audiences as in the days of Webster and Clay, yet the underlying individualism of the American movement of the last century is still deep-rooted in the national character. "Individual liberty," and the accompanying notion that every man can "get on" without external social aid, if he wants to, are to-day stronger in the United States than in any part of Europe. So far as this proceeds from a genuine spirit of self-reliance, and a determination to stand up on one's own feet, and not lean on a superior power, this is worthy of all praise, and is quite compatible with a very much more collectivist state than any existing to-day. But in so far as it is a shirking of social obligation, a denial of human claims, or an antagonism to the organic conception of society, it is not only an evil, it is *the* evil of the nineteenth century, whose τέλος has been truly described as being "organic justice." [2]

The actual condition of America is thus seen to be, from one point of view, not only imperfect, but more

[1] *Faith and the Future.*

[2] Leslie Stephen in his Science of Ethics.

so than even an able critic like Mr. Arnold will admit, more so than Whitman is perhaps aware of. For he, as we have seen, accepts American conditions as "uplifting the masses out of their sloughs," whereas the social facts in New York, Chicago, perhaps even Boston,[1] throw some doubt upon this, and the average income is less than that of Great Britain. He sees the vital necessity of a due measure of wealth as a requisite of general national virtue—"a vast intertwining reticulation of wealth" Whitman happily calls it, thus combining the idea of vast products with that of interdependence, so that the wealth of one shall not be an isolated phenomenon, but shall necessitate the wealth of others. How far America is from this ideal to-day is well known. She may perhaps be nearer to it than the leading European countries, but she is farther from it relatively to her greater advantages. Whitman is not deceived by the vapid talk about the spiritual life being absolutely unaffected by external physical conditions. "No man can become truly heroic who is really poor," he declared to an English visitor.[2] There are many persons who quote ignorantly and unintelligently passages from the Gospels, such as "Blessed are ye poor," or, "The poor ye have always with you," as a kind of semi-apology for leaving things as they are, or as an argument against proposed social changes. And they point to Jesus himself and his Apostles as being

[1] *Cf.* the recent Memorial against tenement house *clothing* presented to the U. S. Senate by Senator Hoar.

[2] *Notes of Visit to Walt Whitman*, by J. Johnston, M.D.

poor in worldly possessions and yet rich in spiritual life. Such apologists for poverty may be unaware that in Nazareth, in the days of Jesus, there were no absolutely poor people in our sense of the term; *i.e.*, no people so poverty-stricken as to be compelled to beg or steal. And neither—significant fact!—were there any rich people. All could manage to live healthy lives. Jesus knew nothing of the complex problems of our modern civilisation; and neither his ideas nor those of any other great religious teacher can be appreciated by those brutalised by daily scrambling for the bare necessaries of life. What is it to be spiritual but to be heroic? The very poor, after years of hopeless effort, are so pinched and cramped that their spiritual growth is stunted, and the possibilities of heroism are choked in the mephitic air of squalid penury. Will you demand great virtues from such miserable victims of distress? As well demand grapes from thorns. What you will usually get is cunning of a low order, lying, shiftless idleness, stolid despair. Not until the avenue of a better physical life is opened will the benumbed nature glow with human warmth and the shrivelled heart expand with human feeling.

But whether Whitman perceives with equal clearness the way out is doubtful. For though he calls for a "vast, intertwining reticulation of wealth," he does not seem to anticipate any considerable organic change in the economic structure of society. How *the vast mass of* men can become appreciably better *off, while a few* are permitted to appropriate such

large share of the total income, does not appear. Nor is it obvious how this condition of things which has developed with such startling rapidity in America can be altered without considerable economic changes, to be partly affected by political means. Whitman is not a political economist, and does not profess to be one, and we have, therefore, no right to demand from him any definite suggestions as to the methods for increasing the total production, and decreasing the waste and effecting the better distribution of wealth. These are questions for the statesman, the publicist, the practical reformer, not for the poet or the seer. But we do expect from the latter a kind of hint as to his social proclivities, a presentiment as to the general direction of the curve of social progress. And here Whitman somewhat disappoints us. He declares merely for freedom of trade and for "middling property owners;" for "men and women with occupations, well-off, owners of houses and acres, and with cash in the bank."[1] And he tells his English visitor that America's great hope "lies in the fact that fully four-fifths of her territory is agricultural, and must be so, and while in the towns and cities there is a great deal of pretentious show, sham, and scum, the whole country shows a splendid average," and that therein lie his hopes for the future.[2] From which one infers that the poet looks forward to agricultural life, and individual, as contrasted with corporate ownership, as the

[1] "*Democratic* Vistas," from Specimen Days, p. 221.
[2] *Notes of Visit*, by J. Johnston, M.D., p. 12.

economic foundation of the American Republic. Such was its foundation, but it is not so now, and he would be a very bold and even rash person who would predict that this will be the material basis of the future American nation. The truth is that agriculture is scarcely advancing at all, that the tendency to town life is even stronger than in England, and that corporate ownership has extended itself more rapidly than in any other country. According to the leading English authority on the United States, the wealth of joint-stock corporations is estimated at one-fourth the total value of all property.[1] The growth of tenant-farming, under absentee landlordism and of heavy mortgage indebtedness, in the great States of the Mississippi valley is assuming dangerous proportions.[2] The actual evolution is not at all in the direction desired by Whitman, but in quite another: as indeed is the case in Europe, and perhaps most of all in Australia, where, in the colony of Victoria, nearly one half of the entire population live in and about the single city of Melbourne.

One has to echo in some degree the charge which Mr. F. W. H. Myers brings against the glowing prophecies of Victor Hugo respecting "the Republic." We instantly ask, what republic? Is it the republic of a peasant democracy like that of Switzerland or Norway; or is it a complex republic, both agricul-

[1] Bryce: *The American Commonwealth*, III., p. 421, note.

[2] *See articles in The Forum* for 1891.

tural, industrial, and commercial, like that of New York? Venice was a republic, and the Canton of Unterwalden is one; but they are no more alike than Macedon and Monmouth. Is the republic of the future to be based on agriculture and on individual ownership of the means of life, or on a complex industry and on public or corporate ownership, or on absolute, complete collectivism? This is no mere question of machinery; it is a question of vital tendencies, of social feeling, a question reaching up into the domain of art, religion, and domestic life. And to this question Whitman gives no satisfactory reply, other than the rather vague reflection about Equality: "As if it harm'd me, giving others the same chances and rights as myself—as if it were not indispensable to my own rights that others possess the same." But Equality is conceivable alike in a simple individualist community and in a complex highly social one: the question is, which is the American Republic to be? In reply it may be at once said that all the actual tendencies are in the latter direction.

Whitman would in the main minister to the disease of his country by a great and appropriate literature. That is his remedy. He is optimistic as to both material resources and their just distribution; in that direction there is for him no serious problem. The disease is spiritual, and consequently the remedy must be spiritual also. That remedy lies in a great, powerful democratic literature, profoundly religious, modern, *spacious*, healthy, no more Pagan than Christian, *treating frankly of* man as body as well as soul. The

germinal seed of such literature Whitman conceives himself to have given his country and the world in *Leaves of Grass;* but this is the mere beginning, the first rough draft of a literature that shall be to modern democratic society at the same time its pourtrayal and natural expression and yet also its nutriment, its spiritual food. He looks forward to "poets not only possess'd of the religious fire and abandon of Isaiah, luxuriant in the epic talent of Homer, or for proud characters as in Shakspere, but consistent with the Hegelian formulas, and consistent with modern science. . . . Faith, very old, now scared away by science, must be restored, brought back by the same power that caused her departure—restored with new sway, deeper, wider, higher than ever."[1] For the present he is inclined to admit that his countrymen can do nothing better than to "continue to give imitations, yet awhile, of the æsthetic models, supplies, of that past and of those lands we spring from. These wondrous shores, reminiscences, floods, currents! Let them flow on, flow hither freely. And let the sources be enlarged, to include not only the works of British origin, as now, but stately and devout Spain, courteous France, profound Germany, the manly Scandinavian lands, Italy's art race, and always the mystic Orient."[2] But this steeping of the mind in the literatures of various lands and races is to form the mind, to expand our conceptions of the world, to

[1] "Democratic Vistas," *Specimen Days*, p. 253.
[2] "Poetry to-day in America," Ibid., p. 301.

lead to a greater tolerance, a wider outlook, a deeper conception of the almost illimitable forces enfolded in man, and of the magnificent and varied past manifestation of the human spirit. In such a spiritual state we shall be prepared for the great democratic literature of the future.

In the preface to the rhapsody, "Thou Mother, with thy Equal Brood," written in 1872, Whitman expresses his intention in writing, seventeen years before, his *Leaves of Grass*. This book, he says, "is, in its intentions, the song of a great composite *democratic individual*, male or female. And following on, and amplifying the same purpose, I suppose I have in my mind to run through the chants of this volume (if ever completed), the thread-voice, more or less audible, of an aggregated, inseparable, unprecedented, vast, composite, electric, *democratic nationality*."[1] We shall see that Whitman holds up to the actual, crude, very imperfect, straggling but energetic, vigorous, highly intelligent democracy of America a kind of ideal vision of the true America, in all her varied amplitude, her boundless wealth, her resistless power, her grand possibilities. He will "make the continent indissoluble." He will, in the language of Wordsworth, "win the vacant and the vain to noble raptures" by poems "which speak of nothing more than what we are."

To do this he first concentrates attention on the actual land in which his people live. His poetry is

[1] *Specimen Days*, p. 279.

redolent of America. Her immense outlines, her vast prairies, her noble rivers, the scent of her herbage, her clear sky and brilliant sun, her flowing tide of population, her varied types of human character, all live in these pages as in no other book. If America were wiped out, she could be more easily recalled from *Leaves of Grass* than from any other collection of books.

He paints freely on a vast canvas, as in these lines from the great threnody on President Lincoln:

"Lo, body and soul—this land,
My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the ships,
The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light, Ohio's shores and flashing Missouri,
And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn." [1]

Or, as in these from "There was a child went forth":

"Shadows, aureola and mist, the light falling on roofs and gables of white or brown two miles off,
The schooner near by sleepily dropping down the tide, the little boat slack-tow'd astern,
The hurrying tumbling waves, quick-broken crests, slapping,
The strata of coloured clouds, the long bar of maroon tint away solitary by itself, the spread of purity it lies motionless in,
The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the fragrance of salt marsh and shore mud." [2]

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 258. [2] Ibid., p. 284.

Or, as in the "Warble for Lilac-Time":

"The hylas croaking in the ponds, the elastic air,
Bees, butterflies, the sparrow with its simple notes,
Blue-bird and darting swallow, nor forget the high-hole flashing his golden wings,
The tranquil sunny haze, the clinging smoke, the vapour,
Shimmer of waters with fish in them, the cerulean above,
All that is jocund and sparkling, the brooks running,
The maple woods, the crisp February days and the sugar-making,
The robin where he hops, bright-eyed, brown-breasted,
With musical clear call at sunrise, and again at sunset,
Or flitting among the trees of the apple-orchard building the nest of his mate,
The melted snow of March, the willow sending forth its yellow-green sprouts,
For spring-time is here! the summer is here!"

Or, as in the large, ample suggestiveness of the great Pacific coast of America:

"Lands bathed in sweeter, rarer, healthier air, valleys and mountain cliffs."

Or, as in that buoyant, swinging, "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" the onward marching music of the "tan-faced children" pushing on through "dazzling days" and "mystic nights," over prairie and mountain, taking possession of the vast continent and its boundless wealth. No less powerful and vivid are the scenes in the cities, as in the quick patriotic rising in New York, suggested to us in "Drum-Taps," when the "*smooth-faced*, snub-nosed rogue" (or his New York

counterpart) felt, for the first time, a wider world of which he was a part, than the narrow round of daily business:

"The blood of the city up—arm'd! arm'd! The cry everywhere,
The flags flung out from the steeples of churches, and from all the public buildings and stores,
The tearful parting, the mother kisses her son, the son kisses his mother,
(Loth is the mother to part, yet not a word does she speak to detain him.)
The tumultuous escort, the ranks of policemen preceding, clearing the way,
The unpent enthusiasm, the wild cheers of the crowd for their favourites,
The artillery, the silent cannons, bright as gold, drawn along, rumble lightly over the stones."[1]

Or, again, as in the "City of Ships," addressed to New York, under whose showy materialism Whitman appears to discern an ideal beauty and a superb force, as Victor Hugo felt in Paris:

"City of the sea! city of hurried and glittering tides!
City whose gleeful tides continually rush or recede, whirling in and out with eddies and foam!
City of wharves and stores—city of tall façades of marble and iron!
Proud and passionate city—mettlesome, mad, extravagant city!"[2]

Or, as in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," the sights of

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 220. [2] Ibid., p. 231.

"mast-hemmed Manhattan," of the "gorgeous clouds of the sunset" drenching with their splendour the men and women, the "voices of young men," who call the poet by his name, the flags lowered at sunset, the foundry chimneys casting red and yellow light over the tops of the houses. Or the vision of the Japanese envoys, "swart-cheeked, two-sworded," and "bare-headed, impassive," driving through New York's great thoroughfare in a "Broadway Pageant." Spite of the crime and corruption, the empty religious forms, and the omnipresent demon of greed and of low, sharp bargaining, the poet will celebrate the colossal force of city life, as well as the teeming prairies and mighty rivers. All are part of a vast whole which is to him divine. Whitman, in short, while resolutely dealing with the real, at the same time idealises America. He writes to show her people and the world what she may really mean.

Whitman has, too, a very just conception of the real poetry underlying America; the poetry which money-making and politics have seriously injured, but cannot wholly destroy. "Our Old Feuillage" is designed to present an impressionist picture of "These States" arrayed in all their ample variety, and yet "inevitably united and made One Identity." There is a wonderful fascination in the varied elements, the adventures, the heroism which have gone to make up America's life. The story of the stout-hearted Captain John Smith; of the Indian maiden, Pocahontas; of the simple, stern Puritan settlements of New England; of Peter Stuyvesant and the Dutch life of New

Amsterdam; of Oglethorpe's Georgia colony; of the French explorations about the great lakes; of the early Spanish missions in California; of the old French Creole life in New Orleans—what rich and ample materials are here, suggesting vast ethnic preparations and blendings of European peoples to form new combinations. We talk of lack of poetry, but the lack is in ourselves, not in the subject-matter.

But if there is idealism in this brief past, how much more in the vast future. Mr. Ruskin has declined to interest himself in America because there are no castles there. But castles were built by men, and the future of the human race will be there, not here. Whether we like it or not, the sceptre of commerce and industry will as surely pass to America within a very measurable distance of time as another day will dawn. Russia and America—diverse enough in many ways, but alike in their vast territorial expansion and assimilative capacity—seem destined to be the great political organisms, the world-powers of the future. This is Nature's decree, which cannot be set aside by any judgment from another court. A century hence most of the countries of Western Europe will be compared, not with America as a whole, but with separate States of the Union merely. Spiritually and artistically supreme, Europe will politically and commercially recede before the resounding tread of the Western and Eastern giants. But is this Titanic organism to be informed with no soul? That is the American problem, which Whitman has set himself to solve; he wants to help America to find her soul. A future

given up to the despotism of business, to the sway of the smart, vulgar, money-making animal, to dyspeptic middle-class religionism, to the election of lying rogues to office, to the universal reign of the mediocre and the commonplace—this is indeed a future from which the human race may well shrink.

Redemption will come, thinks Whitman, through the spiritual influences of the great poet, bard, seer—what you will. He will speak to the people on equal terms, will be "glad to pass anything to anyone—hungry for equals night and day." He will be filled with the "faith of the flush of knowledge;" he will understand that "the vital laws inclose all." To him "the idea of political liberty is indispensable;" he "sees health for himself in being one of the mass." There must be in him no tricks, but perfect personal candour, and he must understand that "all that a person does or thinks is of consequence." He is to lead the people, not as a master from above, but as a friend and comrade in their own ranks, passing on to them the bloom and odour of the earth, of the flowers, of the atmosphere, of the sea, radiant in strength, with a healthy dash of barbarism, yet recognising fully the value of the "long result of time." We may, in brief, sum up Whitman's idea of the modern redeemer, the light-bringer, the friend of man, in his own words: "The direct trial of him who would be the greatest poet is to-day. If he does not flood himself with the immediate age as with vast oceanic tides, if he be not himself the age transfigur'd, and if to him is not open'd the eternity which gives similitude to all

periods and locations and processes, and animate and inanimate forms, and which is the bond of time, and rises up from its inconceivable vagueness and infiniteness in the swimming shapes of to-day, and is held by the ductile anchors of life, makes the present spot the passage from what was to what shall be, and commits itself to the representation of this wave of an hour, and this one of the sixty beautiful children of the wave—let him merge in the general run, and wait his development."[1]

Whitman's faith in America was revived by the heroism displayed by the average man in the Civil War; the heroism and the idealism also. "We have seen the alacrity with which the American-born populace, the peaceablest and most good-natured race in the world, and the most personally independent and intelligent, and the least fitted to submit to the irksomeness and exasperation of regimental discipline, sprang, at the first tap of the drum, to arms—not for gain, nor even glory, nor to repel invasion—but for an emblem, a mere abstraction—for the life, *the safety of the flag*."[2] And he exultingly exclaims in "Drum-Taps":

"I have witness'd the true lightning; I have witness'd my cities electric;
I have lived to behold man burst forth and warlike America rise."[3]

[1] Preface to First Issue of *Leaves of Grass*. *Specimen Days and Collects*, p. 273.

[2] "Democratic Vistas." *Specimen Days*, p. 216.

[3] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 230.

Spite of its materialism and hypocrisy, he has faith in the land, faith in the average man's firm resolution, courage, audacity, friendliness, fluid power. It is all, he thinks, latent in him, deep down beneath the outward froth and turbulence, the great, real, permanent fact. To mirror that calm, healthy, broad inner life, alike in its essential qualities and in its varied manifestations, was Whitman's own mission; and it must be, in his view, the true aim of American literature.

III.—HIS ART.

WHEN beginning his self-imposed task, Whitman appears to have been staggered by the vastness of his own conceptions. The view was so extensive, the distance was so great, the sights that could be seen, and the tendencies that were unseen, so overwhelming, that the poet was intoxicated by the vision. He lacked, too, discrimination and art. He had absorbed divine influences from past thinkers, but he had no sense of the laws of style, or, indeed, the sense that there were any laws. Hence, the sometimes—one might be induced to say, the frequent—formless lines, and the attempts to produce effects which no great artist would have employed. The poet was unable, through lack of literary culture, to clothe his novel and often glowing conceptions in any ideal poetic form. Rather he flings his ideas at us in a heap, leaving it to us to arrange them in order in our own minds. His results, therefore, fail to satisfy many not unsympathetic readers. And yet of these results Mr. Havelock Ellis has truly said that "they have at times something of the divine felicity, unforeseen and incalculable, of Nature; yet always, according to a rough but convenient distinction, it is the poetry of energy rather than the poetry of art. When Whitman

speaks prose, the language of science, he is frequently incoherent, emotional, unbalanced, with no very just and precise sense of the meaning or words, or the structure of reasoned language." [1]

But it may be fairly argued whether, when he began to write, Whitman did not gain immensely from this imperfect artistic form. He in some sense carried on the tradition of English literature in some of its most virile representatives; which, as has been well said by one of our greatest critics, is a literature of power, as contrasted with the French literature of intelligence. And, further, Whitman the more faithfully expressed the life of his own nation, the very character of his own continent. America had scarcely arrived, has hardly arrived yet, at any consciousness of her true life. She is the land of beginnings and tendencies, her very physical aspect is shaggy and unshorn. She is like a vast edifice, only half finished, with the scaffolding up, and the litter of masonry all round. An American lady is said to have asked a gardener in one of the beautiful Oxford quadrangles, how a lawn could be brought to such a condition of perfection as the emerald turf she saw before her. The reply was, "If you roll and water it regularly for about three centuries you will get such results as you see here." America, with her brief history, rush of immigrants, and dominating materialism, has not been able to reach the artistic repose, the placid beauty to which we are accustomed in Western Europe. Had

[1] *The New Spirit*, by Havelock Ellis, p. 108.

Whitman lived in an atmosphere of such repose; had he been brought up on European culture, he could only at best have added to the kind of work which Longfellow and Irving did so well. In that case he could not have been the voice of this great, rough, virile America, with its "powerful uneducated persons," of whom the cultivated Bostonian authors knew no more than they did of the working-classes of Europe. The very value of Whitman, then, is that he is a genuine American bard. In the conditions of his life and work must be found the justification of his method. His writings contain the promise and potency of future greatness; and he makes no claim for them beyond that they are the first rough draft of a great American literature. "As the births of living creatures," says Bacon, "at first are ill-shapen; so are all innovations which are the births of time." Democracy itself has come in ugly shapes, often revolting to the cultivated mind. "The Republic has no need of chemists," was the exclamation when Lavoisier went to the guillotine. "The divine infant," as Whitman himself puts it, "woke mournfully wailing, amid the roar of cannon, curses, shouts, crash of falling buildings."[1] And we may tolerate much from the uncultured bard of the "divine infant," which we could not put up with from the poet of a rich, full-orbed era or from "the idle singer of an empty day." We must endeavour to find compensation for lack of harmony and discernment, for much that is wooden,

[1] "France." Leaves of Grass, p. 188.

flat, prolix, in Whitman's writings, in that great quality which Mr. Arnold, echoing Mr. Swinburne, finds in Byron,—"the excellence of sincerity and strength."

Still it must be confessed that when we turn from the solemn organ music of Milton, the rhythmical perfection of Coleridge, the lyric beauty of Shelley, or the sweet cadence of Tennyson, to Whitman's "barbaric yawp," we seem at first to have quitted the haunts of the muses for a modern street where we are jostled by a rough crowd of busy folk, and are splashed with mud from the passing waggons and drays. Those who have long been accustomed to the choicest peaches and hot-house grapes may be excused at first for making wry faces at the wild berry of the woods; although, after a time they will discover its barbaric fascination. It is, however, not merely his Titanic wildness, but his lack of harmony, which must be complained of. And those are very doubtful guardians of Whitman's reputation who do not admit his serious defects, mingled as these are with passages of surprising and even sublime beauty.

We open *Leaves of Grass* at the "Song of the Broad Axe," a most suggestive piece of work, but containing some shocking lines, such as these:

"The six framing-men, two in the middle and two at each end, carefully bearing on their shoulders a heavy stick for a cross-beam."

"*The constructor* of wharves, bridges, piers, bulk-heads, *floats*, *slays* against the sea."

"Goods freely rifled from houses and temples, screams of women in the gripe of brigands."

Take this line from "Calamus":

"For in any roofed room of a house I emerge not, nor in company, and in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn or dead."

Or this line from "A Song for Occupations":

"Were all educations practical and ornamental, well displayed out of one, what would it amount to?"

Or this line in the "Song of Myself":

"What was strewn in the amplest strewing the square rod about me, and not filling the square rod then."

Enough of these. Every rational person who knows what poetry is, and who is willing to concede the widest limits to poetic form, will rightly declare that this is not poetry. Nor can those long categories of objects and places which Dr. Peter Bayne made so merry over [1] be defended, except at the risk of being rightly charged with "Whitmania." Whitman wants to tell us that the modern man, as a democrat, shares in the general life of mankind; a true and fruitful idea. But the way in which this idea is set forth, shocks our sense of form, while it amuses us by its imitation of a cheap shopkeeper's advertisement:

"I am of Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, I am of London, Manchester, Bristol, Edinburgh, Limerick. I be-

[1] *Contemporary Review*, Dec. 1875.

long in Moscow, Cracow, Warsaw, or northward in Christiania, or Stockholm, or in Siberian Irkutsk, or in some street in Iceland."[1]

What a curious medley, what a tedious catalogue! Why these particular places and not others? And note, too, the American vulgarism, "belong in." Whitman is by no means destitute of a sense of humour; but he must surely have jotted down these and many other lines in a museum, whose catalogue this categorical form would fit were it complete. But, however suggestive the long roll of far-off cities and lands may have been to the poet's own mind, they have no place in anything that can lay claim to an ideal treatment of man and his world. They give the enemy occasion to blaspheme, and they furnish the young gentlemen of the *Oxford Magazine* with good subject-matter for amusing parody. The writer intends to be impressive, but he is actually tiresome.

Whitman is also guilty of that strained affectation which shows itself in coining new and ugly words, and of that conceit which reveals itself in unusual and grandiose phraseology: while he sometimes spoils the effect of a line or passage by verbal redundancy. These are perhaps peculiarly American vices, or at any rate were so in the "spread eagle" period of American history, when Dickens produced "Martin Chuzzlewit." Whitman writes "philosophs" instead of philosophers, "Americanos" instead of Americans, "Libertad" in place of Liberty, while the Presidency

[1] "*Salut* au Monde." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 117.

is converted into the "Presidentiad," as though Spanish was the language of the American people. Avatar is turned into "avataras," delicacy becomes "delicaesse," reminding you of a German store for "colonialwaaren." "Ye untold latencies!" he exclaims, referring to the forces still folded in germ in mankind His confidence in America he expresses thus: "Still the future of the States I *harbinge* glad and sublime." We are reconciled to Manhattan as another name for New York; but who can put up with "Mannahatta"? The use of French words here and there, such as *allons, ma femme*, seems a kind of stage trick, as does such a word as *affetuoso*. When he speaks of an inhabitant of Japan as a Japanee, we think at once of Bret Harte's "Heathen Chinee." But the latter is admittedly Californian slang, while the former is used in a serious poem, the "Broadway Pageant." In "Democratic Vistas," Shakspere is referred to somewhat in the language of an advertising mustard or soap maker, as "astral genius, first-class." In the same work a liberal thinker is called a "Liberalist." Every one of these instances (and many more might be adduced) is inflated, clumsy, in the worst taste. Why, too, in the mystic and deeply suggestive "Chanting the Square Deific," is the Holy Spirit made feminine? The English might have been used, or if not that, then the Latin *Spiritus Sanctus*. The repetition of the word "arriving" in the second line of the wondrously beautiful death-chant from "When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed" is a case of redundancy. It *is not easy either* to perceive any meaning at all in

some of Whitman's passages; as, *e.g.*, "Let them that distrust birth and death lead the rest"; or, "Let the old propositions be postponed." He reminds one of the old-fashioned unintelligent study of the Bible, when every part was thought by the devout to be equally inspired. So Whitman cannot perceive when he is writing a mass of verbiage or a patch-work of uncouth lines and phrases and when he is moved by the breath of the spirit. All is for him equally good. This is partly due to the fact that he never met with intelligent and sympathetic criticism in his own country for many years. The dapper little gentleman of Boston, and even some of the greater writers of that "Modern Athens," were only scandalised by this unwonted product of a democracy in which so many of them only thought that they believed, and in which some among them frankly believed not at all. Emerson and Thoreau alone greeted with a hearty welcome this new bard who had conferred on the world what the former declared to be "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed." [1]

But having noted some of the faults and deficiencies of Whitman, we must, on the other hand, say, as Mr. Lowell says of Wordsworth, that "he is great and surprising in passages and ejaculations." After plodding wearily through broken ground, strewn with rough boulders and sharp flints, we emerge on Elysian meadows of peace, or stand amazed at a majestic torrent, or view

[1] Emerson to Whitman, quoted in Bucke, p. 83.

with awe the terrible beauty of a great white peak thrusting its stern purity far into the blue. How steeped in the spirit of loveliness are these lines from the "Song of Myself":

"Smile, O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes." [1]

No reader who has broken his teeth over some rugged passage, clumsy in construction, or crowded with uninteresting detail, will fail to render his tribute to such lines as the following:

"Yon lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish'd with gold."

From the "Passage to India."

"Practical, peaceful life, the people's life, the People themselves
Lifted, illumin'd, bathed in peace—elate, secure in peace."

From the "Song of the Exposition," where the crescendo movement yields to a sweet cadence, gradually dying away in perfect calm. Above all, in

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 46.

numberless passages from that magnificent Burial Hymn of President Lincoln:

"When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

"With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air,

"Dances for thee, I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

"Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim."

In each of these instances one finds, with Mr. W. M. Rossetti, "a deep and majestical rhythmical sense." Whitman has caught too, and expressed, in a most striking poem, the power and majesty, the wonderful mystery of so common an object as a locomotive:

"Fierce-throated beauty!
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless
Music, thy swinging lamps at night,

. . . . . .

"Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong."

He has expressed here just the feeling which the engineman has for the wonderful object whose movements he directs: he idealises it as a splendid, strong-limbed, passionate, almost voluptuous beauty, with coarse black hair, and eyes that shoot flames—his fierce, devoted mistress. Noted also is that noble poem addressed "To the Man-of-War Bird" "who hast slept all night upon the storm," "at dusk that look'st on Senegal, at morn America, that sport'st amid the lightning-flash and thunder-cloud"—a little poem full of vast sweeping movement. Of very striking beauty and infinite suggestiveness too, is that poem, "On the Beach at Night,"[1] clothed with the silent majesty of the sea and of the night:

"On the beach at night
Stands a child with her father,
Watching the east, the autumn sky.

"Up through the darkness,
While ravening clouds, the burial clouds, in black masses spreading,
Lower sullen and fast athwart and down the sky,
Amid a transparent clear belt of ether yet left in the east,
Ascends large and calm the lord-star Jupiter,
And nigh at hand, only a very little above,
Swim the delicate sisters, the Pleiades.

"From the beach the child holding the hand of her father,
These burial clouds that lower victorious soon to devour all,
Watching, silently weeps.

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 205.

"Weep not, child,
Weep not, my darling,
With these kisses let me remove your tears;
The ravening clouds shall not long be victorious,
They shall not long possess the sky, they devour the stars only in apparition;
Jupiter shall emerge, be patient, watch again another night, the Pleiades shall emerge,

"They are immortal, all those stars both silvery and golden shall shine out again,
The great stars and the little ones shall shine out again, they endure,
The vast immortal suns and the long-enduring pensive moons shall again shine.

"Then dearest child, mournest thou only for Jupiter?
Considerest thou alone the burial of the stars?

"Something there is,
(With my lips soothing thee, adding I whisper,
I give thee the first suggestion, the problem and indirection).
Something there is more immortal even than the stars,
(Many the burials, many the days and nights, passing away),
Something that shall endure longer even than lustrous Jupiter,
Longer than sun or any revolving satellite,
Or the radiant sisters, the Pleiades."

Vastness is always a dominant note in Whitman's writings, and leads him ever to recur to the great themes which most completely illustrate it, as the great and deep sea stretching into infinitude with its

never-ceasing murmur and infinite suggestions, type of the sea of life on which sails the immortal ship—"ship of the body, ship of the soul, voyaging, voyaging, voyaging," or the "huge and thoughtful night," "the night in silence under many a star," or this great globe which floats us through the celestial spaces:

"Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies wide,
Over the dense-packed cities all, and the teeming wharves and ways."

But most of all does Whitman peer with longing and audacity into the "superb vistas of death." Of all the dirges in the English language, remembering even *Lycidas* and *Adonais*, none leaves so profound an impression of beauty and majesty as the great Burial Hymn of President Lincoln, beginning, "When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd." Whatever else may be said of Whitman's poetry it must be conceded that he has treated this eternal theme of death with a new power and significance. The awful dreams that may come in that sleep of death have no terror for the democratic poet, nor does he trouble himself much with the "fond breast" on which "the parting soul relies." "To one shortly to die," he brings his message, singling him out from all the rest. He does not argue, but sits quietly by, assuring the dying man with the peaceful force of a deep faith that he himself will surely escape, leaving behind nothing that is worth *keeping*.

"The sun bursts through in unlook'd-for directions,
Strong thoughts fill you and confidence, you smile,

. . . . . .

"I exclude others from you, there is nothing to be commiserated,
I do not commiserate, I congratulate you.

"Every wonder is possible in those 'superb vistas,'
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land."

He hears "whispers of heavenly death;" to his ear come sounds of "footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes wafted soft and low." Death is "lovely and soothing," it is the "dark mother always gliding near with soft feet." In the "loving, floating ocean of death" we are laved in a flood of bliss. The soul turns with joy to "vast and well-veiled death," and the body, weary with its pilgrimage, turns, like a tired child, "gratefully nestling close" in the bosom of this divine motherhood. The death-song, low and wailing in its first bars, grows louder and clearer until it floods the night and pours its serene melody over the world. The dead are "made one with Nature," as Shelley made the soul of Keats:

"They fit very well in the landscape under the trees and grass,
And along the edge of the sky in the horizon's far margin."

The ghastly river of Styx has lost itself in "the seas of God," whom each soul will front at the goal of its long voyage,

"As filled with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms."

His "Last Invocation" is that his real self should "glide noiselessly forth" from the fleshy portals of the house of life into the "measureless oceans of space," where he believes that "Heavenly Death provides for all."

In all this death-poetry of Whitman the "last enemy" is presented as no enemy at all, but a friend, an object of wonder, beauty, and desire, an essential part of an infinite world-order, which is viewed, as the philosophers say, *sub specie eternitatis*, and which is, therefore, found to be all good and perfect. Shakspere, still under the dominion of mediæval thought, leads us in *Measure for Measure* to the grinning death's-head of the charnel-house, and in *Hamlet* to the brink of a possible penal abyss. Milton sees in vision his beloved Lycidas joining in the "inexpressive nuptial song in the meek kingdoms blessed of joy and love;" but he is alternately filled with Puritan and with an unreal classical sense of death. Shelley in *Adonais* comes nearer to a natural view, for in his mind the soul of Keats "has outsoared the shadow of our night." But Whitman is beyond them all. Beyond the dim shadowy forms ferried over the dark river and flitting by in the joyless meadows of asphodel; beyond the chrism and priestly absolution, the hell, purgatory, and paradise of mediæval thought; beyond the Puritan judgment-day and the triumphant reign of the saints. Death with him is a perfectly natural liberating force, releasing the permanent self into the possibilities of a higher plane of being. It puts an end to nothing but a certain physical organ-

ism, which is so constructed that it cannot live except by dying daily, and which in the very nature of things must ultimately decay as a separate thing, and mingle gradually, atom by atom, with the world of material forms out of which it grew. The very wonder of the process fills him with a sense of its strange beauty, and therefore provides us with a new artistic treatment of death at his hands, a treatment diffused with a beautiful solemnity that partly affects us like some impressive scene in Nature, and partly like the magnificent religious music which thrills the soul's most secret fibres at the celebration of the mass.

In considering the leading themes of Whitman's poetry and his method of treating them, it is impossible to overlook the series of poems called "Children of Adam," which chiefly led to the outcry against their author in the professed name of supposed outraged decency. These poems occupy but fifteen pages of *Leaves of Grass* out of nearly four hundred; but the finger of censure was instantly directed at them. These poems celebrate in very plain language the joy of sexual love; a subject as old as literature itself, and yet ever new and necessarily forming a dominant theme for art in all its varied manifestations. What are we to say of this series of poems?

It is impossible to echo the opinion of a friendly American critic, Mr. E. C. Stedman, who, finding great power and beauty in most of Whitman's writings, deprecates "Children of Adam." It appears that Emerson argued on this point with Whitman when the latter visited Boston in 1860. We are not

precisely told whether Emerson disapproved the subject altogether, or Whitman's particular way of treating it merely. We can scarcely suppose the former, since Emerson had too much discernment not to see that the question of sexual love is an integral part of Whitman's song of the "Modern Man." We must assume, therefore, that it was Whitman's literary method to which the Concord sage objected. And here, Emerson, though himself no master of poetic form, was right. The true criticism of the poet's treatment of this passionate, vital, but delicate theme is that it is bare, categorical, physiological. It is too much a method of flat, tabulated detail, too little of fine and beautiful suggestion. The poet is right when he determines "to make illustrious" a part of the natural order, even, as he says, "if I stand sole among men." But he has introduced an element of rankness and an elaboration of detail that might have been left out without any interference with the essential design. This criticism, however, applies to all of Whitman's work; it reveals the reproach from the artistic point of view, which is not confined to "Children of Adam." This is a legitimate ground of objection to Whitman as an artist, as has already been indicated. But no specific objection can rightly be urged against "Children of Adam" on that ground.

We all know that most American and much English literature has been written with the fear of the "young person" before the author's eyes. This interesting figure is of course by no means to be ignored. It is right that in the many mansions of art there should be

innocent little boudoirs in which she can converse with the spirit of Mrs. Hemans, as in her still younger years she wondered with Dr. Watts at the twinkling star or the busy little bee. Many charming American books for the "young person" have been written which even those who are not young persons can read with delight. But two things are certain: first, that the "young person" does not remain such for a very great length of time; and second, that literature written from that point of view can never be charged with the energy, passion, and grandeur which are born out of the great experiences of life. The literature of power always has been, always will be, written for full-grown men and women, for those who have tasted of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and who are yet athirst for the fountain of the water of life. If this has been true in the past, even more true must it be in the era of democracy. For the world can no longer be regarded as under a curse, nor can man, or any part of him, be considered as inherently vile. The modern man must stand up in his native dignity, asserting his claim to be here, and to partake of the great feast of Nature.

The particular poems under consideration were written for lover, mistress, husband, wife, for the average sane adult, as a statement of the modern view of the sex-relation. A thinking and healthy mind will read them with a full assurance of the high motives by which their author was animated. How a pure and *true woman may* be affected by them may be seen *from the tribute of* the late Ann Gilchrist. Whitman,

be it always understood, covers the whole field of life, and he could not therefore have ignored in his scheme one of the most vital and universal of relations; a relation, too, upon which, as he saw it, the ordering of modern society so largely depends. It is love which rears this great social frame. All proceeds from the love in the heart of a man for a woman, itself but a part, as Whitman held, of a wider, universal love. With the first rude embrace in some cave far back in the dim twilight of history is born the soul that has raised our eternal institutions, our art, our law, our science, and our religion. "From harmony, from heavenly harmony," this great human order does really develop itself; and that harmony is perpetually expressed in the offices of love. These offices reach from the outer garment of the flesh to the inmost shrine of man's spirit. Such is Whitman's view. And until flesh and blood reality is, to use Coleridge's phrase, "defecated to a pure transparency," our poet, who is at the same time realist and idealist, will be justified in treating of the whole of man as we know him.

The fact that Whitman cannot do this without rousing against him the abuse of those who often hide pruriency under the cloak of prudery is one of the severest satires of our current morality—a morality which allows freely all manner of nauseating divorce-court details devoid of a single redeeming feature to be read by everyone who can afford a halfpenny, while it confiscates the translations of the novels of Zola. Whitman's treatment, be it remembered, is

frank, out-spoken, and sincere; there is no veiled *double-entendre*, no parade of innuendoes, no sly giggle over an amorous passage. It is an open, exuberant hymn of delight over man as body as well as spirit; and although it would have been out of place in an age either of sincere Monasticism or of sincere Puritanism, it is essentially in harmony with the free large life of the modern world. An objection to a full and proper treatment of the human body in its ideal relations in modern poetry can easily develop into an objection to its treatment in the marble of Phidias or on the glowing canvas of Titian. And those who adopt this objection may find themselves logically driven to the position of the Boston prude, who covered up the legs of her dining-table lest they should be seen of men.

The great fact of sexual love on the physical side is always regarded by Whitman as subordinated to universal ends. Thus, in "Songs of Parting," he exclaims:

> "I announce the great individual, fluid as Nature,
> Chaste, affectionate, compassionate, fully armed."[1]

The madness of passion does not overcome; it is related to a central purpose, ensphered in a nature dedicated to what the Greeks called "temperance." We have had false notions propagated by monks and Calvinists, by Syrian hermits and Western religionists, as to the virtues of abstinence. This ascetic dogma

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 381.

was an obvious reaction against extreme licence; but the one is as false as the other. There is no virtue in abstinence whatever. It is in itself barren as Sahara's sand, void of life as the cold, dead moon. It is in reasonable self-control that virtue resides; in the positive, healthy direction of all human actions by a good will and a clear intellect. This is exactly what happens in Whitman's "great individual, fluid as Nature." He is thoroughly at home in the world, and his actions are beautiful, his relations with comrades and with women sweet and full of charm, because his is the never-erring balance, the perfect poise. There is no such man absolutely, nor may there ever actually be such; but the world-movement "makes for" such a wholesome embodiment of righteousness.

It may be asked whether Whitman is a poet at all. One need not be specially anxious to show that he is, but some protest is needed against any judgment that included, say, Addison and Johnson, in the list of poets (not to mention Blackmore and Cibber) and left out Whitman. What is a poet? Is he the manufacturer of rhyming stanzas? If so, we should have to include under the head of poetry that interesting verse, so full of incident:

> "I put my hat upon my head
> And walked into the Strand;
> And there I met another man
> Whose hat was in his hand."

This stanza contains rhyme, grammar, incident, and

suggestion, but it is not poetry. But when we read such great words as—

> "Men must endure
> Their going hence, even as their coming hither;
> Ripeness is all—"

we feel at once that this is poetry, this is creative art. Let us listen to the noble language of Shelley: "Poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It justifies the bold and true words of Tasso—*Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta.*"[1] In the same essay Shelley claims for poets that they are not only "the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society, and the inven-

[1] *A Defence of Poetry.*

tors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion." In accordance with this judgment, Shelley claims for the philosopher, Plato, a place among the poets, and for the poets, Shakspere and Milton, places among the philosophers.

Now, accepting this large and far-reaching view of the poet's nature and function, we may certainly classify Whitman as a poet with greater confidence than we may so treat pleasing and graceful but superficial moralists like Addison, or makers of ponderous rhyming platitudes like Johnson. Mr. Arnold's famous phrase, "criticism of life," is, perhaps, inadequate as giving no suggestion of glow and rapture, which we rightly regard as essential elements in creation. But it comes as near to a true definition as any mere phrase can if we add to it the idea of a heightened and expansive power. In this sense we see more clearly who and what the true poets of the world have been. The early rhapsodists, the Celtic bards, the makers of sagas and of the songs charged with primal human experiences chanted in rude chorus by boatmen rocking on the tide or by peasants joyously treading the vintage—these would hardly have satisfied Boileau and the French Academy. Voltaire would have pronounced them "intoxicated barbarians" as he pronounced Shakspere. They knew nothing of formal rules, but they had the power of divination. They treated in an ideal spirit the

civilisation of their land and time; they preserved with holy care its mystic traditions; they uttered its faith and aspirations, they expressed the deepest feelings for its social sanctities, for the ideal side of its traditions and laws. They loved and interpreted Nature, they felt in their souls the beauty of her life, they delighted in heroism and comradeship.

Surely it is these elements that constitute the very soul of poetry. The creative spirit seizes on the facts of Nature and of life, shows them fluid and related, transforms and glorifies them with "the light that never was on sea or land." He who is possessed with this spirit has a far loftier title to the name of poet than has the manufacturer of flawless, brilliant, mechanical versicles. To these bardic ranks Whitman belongs. He is too primitive and elemental to be classed even among such literary rebels as Byron and Shelley, while his sweep is too vast, his thoughts too deep, to admit of rank with such a poet as Burns. Whitman is, in truth, of the order *sacer vates*, for he feels in our modern life the moving breath of the spirit. To him may be applied the words which Emerson used of Goethe: "Amid littleness and detail he detected the genius of life, the old cunning Proteus, nestling close beside us, and showed that the dulness and prose we ascribe to the age was only another of his masks." [1] It is not of course implied that Whitman has Goethe's vast knowledge, deep culture, sense of form. He is rather like a strong

[1] *Representative Men.*

inspired toiler, possessed of a far greater proportion of genius and insight than of culture, who tells us in a certain crude and partly amorphous way, but with a compensating power and originality, how nature, humanity, and modern life affect him. He does this in such a manner as to stir our emotions, widen our interests, and rally the forces of our moral nature. We must ever remember that he endows us with the gift of life rather than with literature.

> "Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this, touches a man."[1]

It might even be contended that his formlessness holds the germs of new forms; that the old rhymes will rather be used in the future for mere *vers de société* than for great poetry. We know something of the nineteenth century's experience in reference to music. The innovators had to fight their way against ridicule and genuine dislike; until many special movements, and, at least, one entire opera of Wagner, have become almost as hackneyed as any of the Italian airs, or, indeed, as anything in the pre-Wagnerian music. It may also be argued that the vast, sweeping conceptions of our age, the suggestions of an infinite surging movement, of an all-pervading rhythmic life, can never be confined in the narrower and more precise forms of the poetic art, and that Whitman's work affords, in some degree, a hint of things to come. The spiritual enlargement and

[1] "Songs of Parting," from *Leaves of Grass*, p. 382.

exaltation brought about by Christianity led to new forms of art. The Christian world could no longer express its ideas in

> Pure form, nakedly displayed,
> And all things absolutely made."

Our own time is manifestly imbued with the ideas of artistic change. The marvellous growth of music, with its capacity for interpreting subtle emotions and workings of the imagination, is the dominant artistic fact of our own time. We seem to come nearer to the essential fact, to seize on the very spirit of life. We can no longer tolerate the surface ideas expressed in the smooth and easy lines of an earlier age. Like Faust, we yearn to reach the very fountains of being, to see behind the act the character, beneath the form the substance. The novel becomes more psychological, music more complex and spiritual. In such a movement, the genesis of a new epoch in history, there will inevitably be experiments doomed to failure as well as to success. The claim made for Whitman is, not that he is a great artist, for he is not, not even that he is a great poet, but that he has apprehended the needs of our time, has perceived that some restraining shackles must be cast off, and has led the way, as a strong, valiant pioneer, to a new literature which shall chant the deeds and faith of the modern man.

Our acceptance of Whitman, therefore, mainly de*pends on* whether we accept the advent, welcome or

unwelcome, of a new world; on whether we really b
lieve that the old forms are exhausted; on wheth
we can say with him—

"Away with old romance!
Away with novels, plots, and plays of foreign courts;
Away with love-verses sugar'd in rhyme, the intrigu
amours of idlers,"

And can also

"Raise a voice for far superber themes, for poets and f
art,
To exalt the present and the real,
To teach the average man the glory of his daily wa
and trade."[1]

Here is the ultimate ground of judgment on Whi
man's verse; here is the ultimate test which wi
decide whether he is welcomed or repulsed. Do w
long for a larger, deeper life, for a richer experienc
no matter how bought? Have we courage enough t
quit the shallows for the deep blue? Shall we b
content to "glance, and nod, and bustle by," please
with the gay show, cynically amused by the "pickl
herring farce-tragedy," satisfied to be polite and suav
and to skim gracefully the surface of things? C
must we dive down to the tangled roots beneath th
ocean floor, penetrate beyond the external shov
search eagerly for hidden meanings and subtle sugge
tions? Do we care supremely for the soul of ma

[1] "*Song of the Exposition.*" Leaves of Grass, p. 167

do we readily concede to others that which we claim for ourselves, have we faith in our fellowmen, and in the order of which humanity is a part? Or if not, at least do we desire it, do we reach out with longing for it, do we feel that all else may well be given for this pearl of great price? Whitman's writings are, it may be said, like olives, an acquired taste. But there are some tastes never acquired by some people. And the sleek, respectable, well-fed hosts of Philistia will never probably acquire a taste for the "good, gray poet;" not because of his singular versification, nor his alleged indecencies, nor his absence of the cultivated academic spirit. No; they will dislike him because he is unconventional, uncomfortable, because he makes them ill at ease, because, like Madame Pistol (*ci-devant* Quickly), they hope there is "no need to trouble" themselves with any great thoughts while on an easy path to "Arthur's bosom." The household of Podsnap is as fearful of Whitman's glorious audacities as a nervous invalid would be of taking a morning gallop on a thoroughbred. And the Podsnap household is not a small one; it may die out, but it will not be yet.

But those whose hearts are stout and daring, whose imagination dilates with wonderment at this great and awful, but splendid mystery in which we are enfolded, whose affections go forth to all the sons and daughters of men, who with all the strength and sincerity of their nature desire fraternity and justice, as they desire personal good for themselves, who are determined to bow to no idols however venerable, but to stand

up on their own feet, and confront whatever destiny may bring—these will love Whitman. For they will nestle gratefully in these *Leaves of Grass*, while the viewless air passes over them, and the golden sunshine bathes them in its life-giving waves. For these elect

> "In certainties now crown themselves assur'd,
> And peace proclaims olives of endless age."

But even they are but the forerunners. Whitman has no *hortus inclusus*, no aristocratic paradise. In the endless cycles all will arrive; and upon the first-comers merely lies the duty of helping on the rest.

IV.—HIS DEMOCRACY.

WHITMAN aspires to be even more than America's bard: he is the voice of modern democracy. As Virgil uttered his "*Arma virumque cano*," so does Whitman tell us his theme:

"Of Life immense in passion, pulse and power,
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing."[1]

When the phantom of past poetry suggested to him that the theme of the old poets was war, he replies that he sings also of war, but "a larger and greater than any; the field the world, for life and death, for the Body and for the Eternal Soul." To foreign lands who ask him "to define America, her athletic Democracy," he sends his poems that they may discover what it is they want. This is how the *Leaves of Grass* open to the beholder; the purport and intention of the poet's task is avowed. It is not America only of whom he writes, but of Modern Man, as he is being moulded everywhere by the spirit that first arose and had the fullest, freest scope on the American continent. Whitman therefore sings of the Modern Man as workman, friend, citizen, as husband,

[1] "Inscriptions," *Leaves of Grass*, p. 9.

brother, comrade, as pioneer of a new social order, as both material and spiritual, final and most subtle compound of spirit and nature, firmly planted on this rolling earth, and yet "moving about in worlds not realised." The message is as truly for Europe as for America. As representative democratic bard, Whitman exhibits complete freedom from conventionality, a very deep human love, hope for all, faith in the rationality of the world, courage, energy, and the instinct of solidarity. He may be said to begin with the epic of the modern world, in its shirt-sleeves, ploughing and mining, building and weaving, propelling its engines over prairies and mountains, across great rivers and through vast, stormy cities, and steering its gigantic steamers over waters of which Ulysses never dreamed. It is the world of "Titanic forces taking birth,' of strenuous, healthy, defiant, democratic masses; the modern world, in short, as it really is, or is becoming. And from this great plain of physical action the poet ascends to mystic, dimly-guessed spiritual spheres, whence he seems to discern unending progress, till the universe itself appears one vast conscious whole, informed with the spirit of love, and justifying in its ever-ripening issues all the long past of man's painful path from the lower forms of nature to an expanding being utterly beyond our present imagination to conceive.

The general course of things is now tending towards a new type of life and to a new attitude of the individual towards the world. All lines seem to be converging towards a new point in the distant horizon.

Old limitations disappear not only in the physical globe through the inventions of science, but in our own thought, through the growth of the general mind. Expansion is, in short, the dominant idea of our time. Petty states give way to great aggregations; international co-operation becomes more and more general; world beyond world reveals itself to the wondering gaze of man; the local deity in his local heaven yields to the conception, "God is spirit." The Augustinian theology, with its formal and bounded ideas derived so largely from Roman jurisprudence, is giving way to the more fluid Greek idea, unhampered by the early Greek forms. We are probably on the eve of scientific conceptions which will render the science of the nineteenth century comparatively jejune. And in the same way the great industrial forces which are partly dominated by man and which partly dominate him, will, it may be believed, evolve new sociological ideas that will cast society in another mould. Of this new world, with all its powers for good and evil, with all its revolutionary stir, Whitman is the seer. In its light he writes, by its contemplation he is inspired. When he began to write he felt that the literature of his country was, in the main, devoid of vision and presentiment. With the exception of the writings of Emerson, America had produced either mere elegant versifiers, far-off echoes of England, France, and Spain, or conventional authors who accepted without questioning all the respectable dogmas in morals, religion, and society.

Now, how is it possible that any literature can hold

the soul of man by its divine spell when its elements are out of harmony altogether with the spirit of the time and unrelated to its knowledge? Literature must be fast wedded to the real world of thought and life which environs it. And that by no means because we desire to forget or despise the past; but because that very past will become clearer to us if our natures reflect fully the life of our own day. The man who derives least good from the past is the imitating sentimentalist who bows before an outward form from which the inner life has departed. We do not to-day believe in any local hell, purgatory, or paradise. Yet our enlarged spiritual powers enable us to appreciate the spiritual genius of Dante more deeply than those Florentines who drove him out of their city. We see the permanent fact detached from its temporary scenic properties. We know that the inevitable state of the soul is the real substance of Dante's vision; and that all the rest is mere shadow cast by the forms of mediæval thought. Whitman, who perceives this, thus steers an even course between stupid bigotry on the one hand and flippant negation on the other, as *e.g.*, in the "Song for Occupations":

"We consider bibles and religions divine—I do not say they are not divine,
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still.
It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life.
Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than they are shed out of you." [1]

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 172.

This anthropocentric position in literature as in philosophy will produce as vast results as were brought about by the adoption of the heliocentric theory in our conceptions of the physical universe. The State, religion, industry will be directed solely towards the good of man. In times past, humanity has been sacrificed to regal power, to the assumed rights of a caste, to the supposed claims of an external deity on the implicit obedience of his creatures. To-day man is enslaved to money-making, in thrall to machinery, a weary drudge attendant on the incessant demands of the iron monster which he serves. All these forms of slavery are at variance with democracy, every one must be abolished root and branch. The State exists for no other purpose than to realise the collective will of its subjects. If a man sees nothing divine in himself and his fellows, he shall find no divinity in the world at all. Industry shall clothe, feed, and comfort men; man shall not be the slave of the machine. This is the meaning of democracy. It is no crude theory of negation. It does not deny the validity of the great institutions and ideas which have for untold ages expressed in form or language, in sacrificial rite and sacred hymn, the spiritual life of man. But it transforms and develops these, it expresses them in terms of thought, it seeks to raise humanity to loftier heights through their agency; it strives to make more real and true the inspiring word of the Elohim in the ancient Hebrew tradition, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness":—a word to the modern thinker, not descriptive of the past, but prophetic of the future.

Almost the entire volume of *Leaves of Grass* is permeated with this idea; it is, indeed, the central inspiring thought of Whitman's writings. But if any specially apt quotation can be made, it is the following passage addressed "To You," in which the poet speaks from his heart to the average man:

"I will leave all and come and make the hymns of you.
None has understood you, but I understand you;
None has done justice to you — you have not done justice to yourself.
None but has found you imperfect; I only find no imperfection in you.
None but would subordinate you; I only am he who will never consent to subordinate you.
I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself.
Painters have painted their swarming groups, and the centre figure of all;
From the head of the centre-figure, spreading a nimbus of gold-coloured light.
But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-coloured light;
From my hand, from the brain of every man and woman it streams, effulgently flowing for ever.
O! I could sing such grandeurs and glories about you!
You have not known what you are; you have slumber'd upon yourself all your time. . . . . .
There is no endowment in man or woman that is not tallied in you.
There is no virtue, no beauty in man or woman, but as good is in you;

No pluck, no endurance in others, but as good is in you. . . . . .
As for me, I give nothing to anyone except I give the like carefully to you;
I sing the songs of the glory of none, not God, sooner than I sing the songs of the glory of you." [1]

Now, to state Whitman's fundamental democratic ideas in as concise a way as is possible. He is, at the outset, neither absolutely collectivist nor individualist. The care and culture of the individual, his spiritual growth, is, indeed, the final end. The whole vast array and pomp of nature exists to form spiritual individuals. The individual is no mere function of a social whole, no mere cog or pin in the machinery. This development of the individual is so dominant in Whitman's mind, that, though he writes of the "Modern Man," he is always actually thinking of particular types, distinct people. Yet, on the other hand, he sees that the spiritual individual is made a reality by the social whole of which he is a part. Man is not man except as son, lover, friend, citizen. The world pours its life into a man, and he in turn renders back in new forms the gifts so bestowed.

"One's-self I sing, a simple separate person
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse."

In the next place, Whitman's thoroughly sane genius perceives the difference between the State and society. In the last resort the State must rest on force and

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 186.

coercion. We may eliminate many subjects from State control, as the modern world has actually done. But so long as the State exists, so long will coercive force be coterminous with its jurisdiction. The absolute collectivist would extend that jurisdiction to every sphere of life, so that no room shall be left for the individual to turn himself about in and do just as he pleases. The absolute anarchist, on the other hand, would leave people to do what they thought proper in every relation of life. Neither the collective despotism nor the anarchic individualism could, as a matter of fact, last anywhere twenty-four hours; and the Modern Man will certainly not tolerate either. The great problem for reformers now is to find out just where the collective action is necessary and desirable, and where it is impossible and dangerous. On the whole, modern society is coming to see that, in the sphere of opinion, there must be no coercion; while in that of practical material affairs increasing, collective regulation is essential. People are free now in nearly every civilised land to publish all manner of opinions, and form societies for their propagation, provided these societies do not use force against the State itself; in which case the State is bound, in order to preserve its existence, to thwart any such aims. On the other hand, men cannot be allowed to injure their neighbours' health, to work them as they please, for their own profit, to subject them to starvation. You can preach a new religion to your fellows, but you cannot maintain an open cesspool in your street. There is really but little of the danger of interference

with genuine liberty that people, calling themselves Individualists (with a very large I), would have us believe. The modern State is beginning, in its national and local capacity, to realise the nature and extent of its powers. We cannot permit the State to be merged into society, nor mere society to take the place of the State. Coercion is still needed, and in many ways it will be extended rather than contracted in the future.[1]

Indeed, it is through this very modern democratic State, with its fairly just balance, that anything in the shape of society is possible. Were the State abolished, anarchy would ensue, to be followed inevitably by despotism. And such despotism would, for the very sake of maintaining its existence, curtail the free action of society. The democratic State can allow full swing to social activities, to voluntary reforming, religious, or æsthetic agencies, working freely among the people; but the despotic State cannot, as has been shown a thousand times over in the history of despotism. The problem for the modern State is how to gather in all the disinherited, how to secure for all opportunity for work, control over the means of life, leisure, culture, health, without undue interference with the freedom of anyone.

This problem suggests that the old notions of freedom must be revised. It is not in the absence of restriction, but in the presence of opportunity, that freedom consists. Where there is the possibility of

[1] "Force till Right is ready," as Matthew Arnold said.

expansion for all, there is freedom. It cannot be said that this exists in any country. Whether the form of government be empire, monarchy, or republic, poverty exists everywhere; and with poverty, as Whitman sees, expansion is impossible. At this very time we read of riots in Berlin and Vienna, caused by lack of bread; of starving millions in Russia; of public provision of food and shelter for unemployed men in the new cities of Australia; and of deaths from starvation in huge, wealthy London. Just in so far as these things are possible, freedom is impossible. Whitman sees this very clearly.

What perhaps he does not see quite so clearly is that public organised action can do more for the physical betterment of men than used to be imagined. Certain forms of industry have been so completely developed, and their products are so absolutely necessary for all, that it is now easy and rational to substitute collective for private ownership in certain important means of producing wealth. It is equally certain that the true freedom of the individual is actually increased rather than diminished by the collective pressure exerted on recalcitrant individuals, provided the pressure is exerted by the authority and through the initiative of the people themselves. Whitman does not see this quite clearly because, while perceiving the distinction between State and society, he, nevertheless, leans on the whole to what may be called the anarchist side, as indeed is the general bent of the American mind. He hears a voice rising prophetic over the carnage of the Civil War:

"The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers.
The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.
These shall tie you and band you stronger than loops of iron.
I, ecstatic, O partners! O lands! with the love of lovers tie you.
(Were you looking to be held together by lawyers?
Or by an agreement on a paper? or by arms?
Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will so cohere.")[1]

On the whole, Whitman seems to look forward to the continuance of the State as chiefly needful for providing free opportunity for the expansion of society. The great State officers are merely servants of the people, working for the good of individuals, from whose ranks they are taken, not to be swathed in an artificial majesty like the monarchs of the out-worn world, but to reflect the native dignity of the people and to return to the ranks when their special task is over. The State itself, however, by no means sinks into insignificance, but retains its value as the great organic bond.

"All thine, O sacred Union!
Ships, farms, shops, barns, factories, mines,
City and State, North, South, item and aggregate,
We dedicate, dread Mother, all to thee!

Protectress absolute, thou bulwark of all!
For well we know that while thou givest each and al (generous as God),

[1] "Drum-Taps." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 247.

Without thee neither all nor each, nor land, home,
Nor ship, nor mine, nor any here this day secure,
Nor aught, nor any day secure." [1]

But while the State forms the organic bond, the great object of desire is free spiritual relationship, in the absence of which all chatter about democracy is empty. The spirit of the new era is that of comradeship, human affection, association, without which democracy is like Dead Sea apples,—gay and lustrous to the sight, but leaving nothing to the taste but rottenness and ashes. The State will provide us with the needful means for forming this free spiritual union, but it can never be a substitute for the union itself. The ideal of Whitman is expressed in those very fine lines, noble in their simplicity:

"I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth,
I dream'd that was the new city of Friends.
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love, it led the rest.
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words." [2]

This great ideal of a true home of the soul far transcends all the mechanical reforms for which so many earnest people are working, and which are in the main needful, but only as means to an end. For consider

[1] "Song of the Exposition." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 164.
[2] "Calamus." *Ibid.*, p. 109.

how few of the strenuous agitators we have all heard and known are fitted to dwell in the "city of Friends." How is it that so many "advanced" people are personally so unattractive? We cannot accept these thin dogmatists, these quarrelsome disputants, these angry egotists, as our leaders into the promised land. One feels that so long as they remain essentially what they are, social changes will be little more than surface changes, with the leaven of the old corruption still working underneath.

How is it that so many, who presumably have no interest in clinging to dying forms, refuse to dance to the reformers' piping? Because it is urged, of ignorance, of prejudice, of apathy, of fear; no doubt, but partly because of the reformers themselves. It is the work of the reformer to chase away ignorance, prejudice, apathy, and fear; these are the very elements that give him the conditions of his task. Men will not follow him, and they are right in refusing him their allegiance, if he is an egotist, a mere schemer, a critical prig, a selfish cynic, or a person with low, mean, narrow aims. Such an one cannot long hide from the people the narrow brain, the hide-bound intellect, the flippant mind, the unlovely disposition. The people's penetration into character is marvellous. Miserable though they may be, they will hug their rags about them and remain inert. The most ignorant superstitious revivalist, if his heart is alive with the flame of human sympathy, will produce more vital and permanent effect on the poor than will the "emancipated" but *cold and calculating* egotist.

And not only will the type of reformer here referred to fail to touch the masses; he will also fail to get the best men to co-operate with him. They will not move except for wider aims and at a higher bidding. They are of the mind of Fichte: "The idea alone moves him,—and where it does not move him, there he has no life, but remains quiescent and inactive. He will never rouse himself to energy and labour, merely that something may come to pass, but that the will of the idea may be accomplished. Until it speaks, he too is silent; he has no voice but for it. He does not respect old things because they are old,—but as little does he desire novelty for its own sake. He looks for what is *better* and more perfect than the present; until this rises before him clearly and distinctly,—so long as change would lead only to difference, not to improvement,—he remains inactive, and concedes to the old the privilege it derives from ancient possession."[1] To the reformer therefore comes Whitman's solemn message:

"Is reform needed? is it through you?
The greater the reform needed, the greater the Personality you need to accomplish it.

"Go, dear friend, if need be give up all else, and commence to-day to inure yourself to pluck, reality, self-esteem, definiteness, elevatedness,
Rest not till you rivet and publish yourself of your own Personality."[2]

[1] *The Nature of the Scholar.*
[2] "To a Pupil." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 302.

But to what ideal of life, to what type of character, shall this reform tend? Whitman conspicuously among modern writers, anticipates that clean-handed, open-hearted, free men and women, honest workers, living together in friendship, living without concealment, living much in the air and sunshine and owning allegiance to no lord or master, caring but little for many of the social distinctions that are highly esteemed now, are the democratic citizens of the future. Like Tolstoi, Whitman has entered into the life of the working-people, and has found among them the healthiest elements of our human nature. By the working-classes he does not mean the dirty, sodden, foul-mouthed vagabond who loafs for hours at a post on the lookout for drink, nor the riotous street-larrikin, both of whom would be dealt with pretty sternly by a genuine democratic community. Nor of course is he thinking of the servile dependant of the country squire, destitute of some of the essential elements of manliness—a type practically unknown in America. He has no reference to the unhappy human wreckage which the sea of poverty and social misery washes on the shores of our great centres of population—though even about these he by no means despairs. He has mainly in mind the self-respecting, healthy, skilled, well-paid and sometimes well-read mechanic or artisan; alert, eager, open-eyed, frank, manly, somewhat too material perhaps, yet with unplumbed depths of idealism in him—strong alike in *body and mind.* And he is thinking too of the bright, *supple, affectionate,* healthy, good-looking woman,

whether as mother, wife, sister, lover, or friend, too independent to be the slave or toy of man, equal with him in every respect, and yet possessing nothing of the sour, atrabiliar anti-masculine sentiment supposed to be a somewhat characteristic note of the "advanced" woman.

Now these desirable, healthy, breezy elements are to-day but imperfectly developed because of the conditions of modern labour. But they are there in germ, awaiting the sun of a renewed human summer to ripen into fruition. And, unless the growth of society is to be again deflected by a cataclysm as in the case of the irruption of the barbarous hordes into the decaying Roman Empire, we may look for a better human type than that of the modern fine gentleman who yawns away his time in a Piccadilly club, or fritters his energies in so-called "sport"; or than that of the "society" lady whose mind is given up to tea-gowns and bric-à-brac, and who is versed in all the fashionable slang and scandal of the turf, the green-room, and the divorce-court.

In Whitman's democracy work is mingled with a barbaric element. He rightly distrusts the emasculating effect of over-culture which is weakening men for action, loosening moral fibre, sicklying o'er the native hue of resolution with the pale cast of thought. He would insist on a healthy dash of barbarism in our weary, anxious, introspective civilisation; a matter of even greater importance in the American than in the English cities. He loves the barbarian as Burns did, as Wordsworth in less measure did. He celebrate

"the friendly and flowing savage, the Indian trapper and the red girl: he, lounging on a bank, dressed mostly in skins; she, with long eyelashes, bare head, and coarse, straight locks descending on her voluptuous limbs." He is "enamour'd of growing out-doors, of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods." He calls to mind the young Texas rangers, "matchless with horse, rifle, song, supper, courtship, large, turbulent, generous, handsome, proud, and affectionate." He yearns to "race naked along the shore," and salutes as the ideal city the place "where fierce men and women pour forth, as the sea to the whistle of death pours its sweeping and unript waves." The modern man is to be no puny, chicken-breasted, stooping, near-sighted anæmic person, but strong, audacious, self-poised, a vigorous being at home with the winds and waves. Throughout nearly the whole of Whitman's writings penetrates the element of rankness, the odour of the fresh-turned earth, the salt sea air, an element of rich, rude, unpruned growth alike in man and the globe. How this element can be realised in mankind, if the universal tendency to city life is permanent, is a problem not altogether easy of solution. Even the keen athletic sports of young men do not, in a crowded country, lead to any deep relations with Nature; while many of us are in danger of forgetting that anything more natural exists than the trim parterres of a suburban garden.

This love for the elemental forces, perhaps, leads Whitman to dwell with exaggeration on the attractiveness of rough, uncultivated natures; but it also

enables him to perceive and welcome the new types of heroism, and to discern their superiority over the military virtues and aristocratic codes of honour which arose in ancient and mediæval times. Whitman loves the average man as a man, and will not have him lopped and hardened into a machine. The Broadway stage-driver, whom he notes, is not merely a human piece of mechanism to pilot a vehicle along the street, but "a good fellow, free-mouth'd, quick-temper'd, not bad-looking, ready with life or death for a friend, fond of women," and so forth. The engineer on the train is not a part of the machinery, but a human being having the same desires as the President or the Secretary of State. How sharply Whitman comes here into collision with a very respectable body of economic and political doctrine which is now breathing stertorously and will soon be, not a body, but a consuming corpse! For the possessors of engines and omnibuses *do* regard those who labour for them as being primarily embodiments of labour-force; it is expressed in the terms of the economic relations existing between them. And these are usually the only relations. For there is probably no railway director in the world who would invite a guard or ticket-collector to his drawing-room and ask him to take his *décolletée* wife or daughter into dinner, although the man in question may be in every way superior to the noodle charged with that honour. The cash-nexus is still mainly the bond, the one bond, which unites the severed classes.

Whitman sees, too, that democracy must have done

once and forever with, not only the forms, but the spirit of feudalism. Great numbers of English people of all grades have not yet emerged from the feudal feeling. They accept the fact of stratified classes distinct from each other. Others take the mechanical, individualist view of society as being composed of unrelated units, though this sentiment is declining fast; faster, perhaps, as a feeling than as a formulated creed. To Whitman, feudalism and mechanism are alike impossible, both hopeless, false, and dead. The modern man must stand clear of the wreck of litter from the past, which but impedes his march and fetters his energies.

"Pass'd! pass'd! for us, for ever pass'd, that once so mighty world, now void, inanimate, phantom world,
Embroider'd, dazzling, foreign world, with all its gorgeous legends, myths,
Its kings and castles proud, its priests and warlike lords, and courtly dames,
Pass'd to its charnel vault, coffin'd with crown and armour on,
Blazon'd with Shakspere's purple page,
And dirged by Tennyson's sweet, sad rhyme."[1]

But because that feudal world is gone forever, it does not follow that society is permanently dissolved into unrelated individuals. Or, if, as Carlyle has it, the Church has fallen speechless from apoplexy and the State shrunken into a police-office, straitened to get its pay, we must build up anew and in nobler

[1] "*Song of the* Exposition." Leaves of Grass, p. 159.

form this shattered world. Not out of the individual breast, as the chorus of spirits proclaimed to Faust, but from the collective life. And this brings us to Whitman's very real and deep historical sense. For, while at times he appears to look with a sort of scorn on "the fading kingdoms and kings over there," and on "the fading religions and priests," he sees very clearly that this new collective life, while ridding itself of mere rubbish, must absorb into its own being all that has really aided in building up man's life on this planet. Unlike the mere revolutionist, dashing himself blindly on the rocks of human institutions, Whitman declares that the modern man must take up and incorporate into himself all of this past life that was good, that he cannot deliberately reject great past periods dedicated to ideas that have sustained and developed the soul of man.

Let the shell of dogma go, but throw not away the precious kernel it inclosed. Let marriage be as free as you will, but do not imagine that freedom means abolition. Indeed, Whitman is at times just a trifle *bourgeois* in depicting the well-ordered home. Let not woman be prevented by arbitrary restraint from living out her own life in her own way; but do not give in to the silly cant that she should do exactly what man does. Let us change our conceptions of what properly constitutes healthy public order; but let us understand that there is a public order. Let us not be deluded into supposing that the great intellects of the human race were all in error, that the State is nothing *but* tyranny, religion but a fraudulent superst-

tion, and that it has been given to some young, unkempt, inflated revolutionist to discover that which has been hidden from the wisdom of ages.

There are people with a violent prejudice against Christianity, who think we must go back to Paganism for our examples and inspiration. There are others prejudiced against Paganism, who insist that we must rely solely on the Christian idea—a matter on which the great fathers of the Church were much more liberal than many of their spiritual descendants. And there is a small school which finds the whole secret in esoteric Buddhism. All these notions are futile. Once more be it said that we cannot "go back" to anything. All these forces and others—our early Aryan communism, the prolonged struggle with the terrible powers of Nature, the rude vigour of the Northern barbarous tribes—these are in our life of to-day, vital elements of it. We cannot deny any; we must incorporate the residual essence of each into the new human synthesis, a process which is aided for us by the wonderful discoveries of science and the great blending of peoples. This is Whitman's final and ultimate view of the real nature of modern democracy.

"Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,
Of value is thy freight; 'tis not the Present only,
The Past is also stored in thee.
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of the Western Continent alone,
Earth's résumé entire floats on thy keel, O ship, is *steadied* by thy spars.

With thee Time voyages in trust; the antecedent
nations sink or swim with thee.
With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics,
wars, thou bear'st the other continents.
Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination—port
triumphant;
Steer then with good strong hand and wary eye, O
helmsman, thou carriest great companions;
Venerable, priestly Asia sails this day with thee,
And royal, feudal Europe sails with thee."[1]

[1] "Thou Mother with thy Equal Brood." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 348.

V.—HIS SPIRITUAL CREED.

THERE is a certain very valid objection to any attempt to construct a metaphysic out of a poet's song. It looks like reading a story for its "moral;" and there have been few agencies more subtly demoralising than the moral tale. We should read both stories and poems for the sake of their beauty and vitality rather than for cheap platitudes as to the virtues of temperance or the wickedness of seduction. Yet it is impossible to take leave of Whitman without considering his fundamental philosophy. For what is philosophy after all but a love of wisdom, and where shall we find the wise man if not in the poet? Philosophy, "musical as is Apollo's lute," consists in an insight into the essential substance of things, and almost every line of Whitman is informed with this.

Whitman does not argue. In the debate on God and the soul, he tells us, he is silent. "Logic and sermons never convince," the grass, the stars, the mother with her babe at her breast strike their roots down deeper into the heart of the infinite mystery than the demonstrations of the schools.

"And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
For I who am curious about each am not curious about
God;

(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about death).
I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand not God in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself."[1]

We are not therefore to look for elaboration of argument, which can be left to the theologians, nor even for that subtle reasoning which pervades so much of Browning's poetry. We find calm affirmation, an attitude of powerful faith. All the great words and ideas of the religious consciousness—God, the soul, the immortal life—are here; divested of their ecclesiastical import, and related to the rushing forces and myriad forms of the world of Nature. The poet, it is true, never had the introspective sense, nor the kind of religious experiences which we associate with St. Paul, St. Augustine, and the author of the *De Imitatione*. He "never felt the need of spiritual regeneration," he told his friend, Dr. Bucke. And he rejoices in the animals because "they do not make me sick discussing their duty to God." He never went through any spiritual crisis; he knows neither the anguish nor the ecstasy of the apostle or the saint. Are we therefore to say with some critics that he lacks soul? It is rather true that he possessed spiritual health in as full measure as his nature was capable of holding. It is the diseased who are conscious of health as an object of desire and who supplicate for

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 76.

deliverance from the body of this death. Whitman had, in the language of Wordsworth, no compunction wrought in him. The tearful page of Augustine's *Confessions* was just as meaningless to him as a treatise on morbid anatomy would be to a healthy child.

Such a condition of the soul unquestionably involves the fading away of certain old types of the religious life, but it does not necessarily mean that the religious life itself has departed. Wordsworth saw that.

> "Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
> If thou appear'st untouched by solemn thought,
> Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
> Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
> And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
> God being with thee when we know it not."

It may be admitted, however, in view of the complexity of human nature and of the almost impossible equal growth of every faculty, that, among Whitman's "splendid and savage old men," athletic women walking in procession through the streets, "brawniest breed of orators and bards," and "august masters of beauty," some of the more delicate spiritual growths of the past can scarcely be looked for. Those of us who regard as inexpressibly precious these more ethereal manifestations of the religious genius must console ourselves with the thought that they were purchased at a great price—a price which average humanity under modern conditions cannot afford to pay. But there is certainly a danger that in this glorification of the body we shall tend to produce

merely a race of splendid animals, well-fed, supple, athletic, powerful, but void of reverence and of the spiritual element.

Those who are impressed in Whitman's writings by this passion for athleticism and sensuous beauty may be inclined to regard the poet as Pagan. In truth he is no more Pagan than Christian; he is modern and inclusive. Were he Pagan he would be reactionary, and therefore impossible as the democratic poet, for the world will never go back to Paganism; as, indeed, it will never "go back" to any faith or form that has been outlived. The same classification has been applied to Goethe; he is also, it seems, Pagan. Such an impression could only be conveyed to those who look upon one side of Goethe, and upon his earlier career. The concluding chapter of Eckermann's *Conversations*, giving us Goethe's final opinions, could not have been written about a Pagan. The sage himself said to Lavater, "I am by no means *Anti*-Christian, not even *un*-Christian, but I am indeed *nicht*-Christian." [1] And this is, perhaps, on the whole, Whitman's general attitude. He looks outward, not inward, as the Christian thinkers and saints do. But he has the reverence for that which is beneath him, which Pagan thinkers never had. And, as Goethe went through many phases from his crude Wertherism to his final transcendental optimism, so has Whitman very obviously modified his early conceptions; discovering a new meaning in pain and sorrow, and therefore em-

[1] Henry Crabb Robertson's Diary, Vol. I.

bracing in his symphonic scale deeper chords than those he had at first struck with such exuberant resonance. This enlargement (as it may be called, for it was not change) of his nature probably dates from the tragedies he witnessed in the hospitals, and from the personal suffering which paralysed his splendid vitality. The note struck in the "Passage to India," and in "Whispers of Heavenly Death," is not at variance with that of "Starting from Paumanok," or of "Calamus," but it is another and deeper. There is no greater delusion, by the way, no more fruitful source of error, than the failure to acknowledge that a powerful mind is always growing, and must not be held closely to its first utterance. When we see what absurd mischief has arisen from the attempt to compress the Pauline writings, aglow with the fire and energy of a strenuous soul, into a hard system of logical dogma—when we perceive, as we all do now, that Shakspere went through, in a few brief years, a wonderful development of soul which can be traced from the early conceits of "Love's Labour Lost" and the romantic passion of "Romeo and Juliet" to the calm wisdom of "The Tempest" and the "Winter's Tale," we may wisely conclude that a man of genius has his phases of inner growth, like the rest of us, and that to look for a narrow, definite, consistent body of doctrine in his writings is to look for something that is not there, that was never intended to be there, and that could not, in the very nature of things, have been there. But Whitman has his abiding, permanent ideas running all through his writings, and which may

be summed up as his philosophy. In the first place we note his perfect, serene optimism, uttered in the original *Leaves of Grass* five years before the philosopher of modern pessimism was laid in his grave at Frankfort. The intention of Whitman is to lead to energy of will-power and fulness of life; that of Schopenhauer to extinction of will, to quietism and individualism of the most extreme type; and ultimately to extinction of will and final absorption into non-conscious being. No judgment will be pronounced here between these two antagonistic views, though it is to one or the other that modern society will come. But certain reflections suggest themselves as to the grounds for Whitman's ideas.

Rousseau, it has well been said, made the poor very proud, because in the average man he saw the ideal man. Out of the charnel-vault of social corruption he saw, as in vision, the emergence of the glorified resurrection body. He therefore spoke to man of his "rights"—a term false if applied to a past historical fact, but true if used of man as he might and should be. In our eagerness to repudiate the crude and unhistorical doctrine of "natural rights," we have gone to another extreme which has led to a feeling of hopeless despair as to society, fortified largely by the doctrines, or supposed doctrines, of Darwinism. In other words, we have gone backward instead of forward in our application of evolution to man. Instead of interpreting man in the terms of that which he is becoming, we have tried to interpret him in the terms of that from which he has emerged. The natural

result has been a wide-spread pessimism, as must always be the case when we worship the established fact, forgetting that a fact is fluid, that it is in a perpetual state of dissolution. As Emerson has it, "Innovation is the salient energy; conservatism the pause on the last movement."[1] But if it is necessary to trace the natural and economic history of man in order to understand him, still more necessary is it to envisage his spiritual aspirations, to supplement the historic by the prophetic and reforming element. Now, whatever else may or may not be, it is certain that reason is in the world, that it has a τέλος which must partake of its own nature; else why concern ourselves with rational action at all? Whitman and the optimists believe, though they cannot scientifically demonstrate, that this τέλος is good, that these issues towards which democratic society is working are not merely momentous but beneficent. Such an attitude of mind is not one of blind credulity, but of rational faith. Those who have not this faith are deprived, as Dante says, of "intellectual good."

"*Ch'hanno perduto il ben dello intelletto.*"[2]

They are excellent, unselfish, learned, it may be; but they are like a watch without its mainspring. Their social effort can only be in the nature of a *pis-aller*. They are labouring on an edifice without a foundation, which the whirlwind will destroy in a

[1] "The Conservative," Vol. I., p. 281 *(Riverside Edition)*.
[2] *Dell' Inferno*, Canto III.

moment's furious onset. Of course, if they have a good and honest will, they are really impelled by deeper motives than they are aware of; but if they acted on grounds of mere logic, they would not trouble themselves about bettering the lot of men. They would agree with Schopenhauer that social reform was a mad delusion, and would logically take to quietism as every true pessimist does. In such a case, indeed,

> "Were it not better done as others use,
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
> Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?"

Or one might respond favourably to the invitation conveyed in one of the Elizabethan dramas, "Will you go drink, and let the world slide?" Certainly he who is not afflicted with the *Welt-schmerz* can scarcely occupy himself more agreeably; although one would be inclined to take the flagon of sack and Amaryllis too. If, however, the subject be of a vehement nature that has brooded in solitude over the miseries of man, he will become aflame with madness and will be likely to plunge into anarchism, "red ruin and the breaking up of laws." For if the world, instead of being the outcome of reason, is a mere fluke, why should not a handful of crazy revolutionists destroy the society which the world has evolved? *Ex hypothesi*, they have nothing against them but mere force, and no man is bound to respect that. Or if the world be the product of a positively evil design, why should not the purifying vengeance of earnest souls devour it in

flames? The actual facts around us cannot be ethically justified; they can only be historically justified as necessary stages in a process, the results of which are hidden, but which must be inferred from the nature of man.

The full sense of these world-forces working up to a mighty *dénouement* is as present to the mind of Whitman as was the sense of the contrast between the woman crowned with the sun and her divine child, and the beast with seven heads to the author of the Apocalypse; one of the earliest attempts, by the way, at a philosophy of history. The rushing tide will carry the bark of man to the shore of truth, it will bring him where he desires to be; the journey is not a mere aimless wandering, it has a goal. The storms by the way will fit man to know the real nature of his world.

"Years prophetical! the space ahead as I walk, as I vainly try to pierce it, is full of phantoms,
Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me,
This incredible rush and heat, this strange ecstatic fever of dreams, O years!
Your dreams, O years, how they penetrate through me! (I know not whether I sleep or wake;)
The perform'd America and Europe grow dim, retiring in shadow behind me,
The unperform'd, more gigantic than ever, advance, advance upon me." [1]

Faith in a rational τέλος is usually weakened by a

[1] "*Songs* of Parting." Leaves of Grass, p. 371.

perpetual suggestion of the problem of evil; not only moral evil, but physical disease and disaster. How can a world filled with crime and misery be related to any good purpose? The question is as old as man, yet ever new. Whitman has no doubt whatsoever on this head, no serious qualms of misgiving. For a moment, now and then, he seems to hesitate, but his scepticism is evanescent as a summer cloud. In a word, we may say that, for him, disease is a necessary mode and condition of the physical, as sin is of the moral life. Either is the price that must be paid for existence; in which case the only question is whether the existence is worth the price. That, of course, can only be answered in two ways. We put the question by, it is true, trifle with it, ignore it, take to our cakes and ale; but sooner or later, it presses down on us with a force we cannot resist. We may either say boldly that the privilege of viewing the fleeting shows of time is purchased at far too dear a price by our ever-recurring bath in the muddy waters of guilt and misery; or we may declare that the rational end is so vast and magnificent as to completely dwarf the evils and hardships we have to undergo. Many of us are so constituted that we can adopt neither of these answers with unhesitating boldness. The personal equation deflects the balance of rational judgment, and we spend our lives in paralysing doubt. Whitman's reply is clear. He feels neither remorseful nor self-contemptuous. The end in view justifies the means. Does a vessel strike on a rock? All on board are provided for by the boundless resources of

the universe, which are directed, in the eternal process and final drift of things, to the preservation of the spiritual individual. Does a man seem to fail "under the heat of this life's day?" Failure is probably the true success, or as Browning says, "but a triumph's evidence for the fulness of the days." The discords rush in, as Browning continues, "that harmony should be prized."

This long drawn-out complex civilisation itself, speculates Mr. Edward Carpenter, may be a sort of prolonged necessary disease, which shall ultimately lead us to a larger, and fuller, and healthy life.[1] The soul plunges from innocence and mere negative purity into the vortex of the world's strife, where it becomes conscious of its nature and personality: and then emerges into a positive and rational order, bringing with it the spoils it has won in its combat of life and death.

Whitman treats the fact of evil as being as natural and important as any other in the full spirit of optimism.

"Roaming in Thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is good steadily hastening towards Immortality,
And the vast All that is called Evil I saw hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead."[2]

There is nothing to be said on this world-old problem

[1] *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure.* (*London*: Sonnenschein, 1890.)

[2] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 216.

of evil but what has been said many times before. But Whitman's view seems to be identical with that of ethical idealism, and may thus be stated:—Conceiving the universe not as a fixed thing but as a fluid movement, and as affording subject-matter for man to work on, we may think of it as being (so to speak) at the outset entirely and positively good, or entirely and positively evil, as a dual realm after the Persian and Manichæan conceptions, or as actually indifferent with infinite potentialities. If we are to view the world as absolutely, actually evil, we must conclude that work for its redemption is idle folly; nor shall we easily discover how it is that any one of us ever dreamed at all of a good world. The gradual cessation of will-activity can alone release a suffering race who, nevertheless, as part of an evil order, have no ground of complaint against that order. There is, therefore, here no sphere for positive moral action. Neither is there on the second hypothesis, when the world is conceived as positively and entirely good at the start. That necessarily means absence of action and reaction, for effort implies resistance. How act if all is perfection at the outset? Our action is to create perfection, to make real and manifest that which is latent. This view, therefore, gives us no human world, but merely a "celestial lubber-land."

John Stuart Mill expressed his surprise that the Manichæan theory had not been revived in our time. But dualism satisfies no mind. It neither gives a clue to any intellectual problem, nor does it afford moral inspiration. For, on this theory, who can tell that

our moral action will be other than the merest forlorn hope? For the forces of the universe cannot be relied on to support the effort of man, nor can man himself be relied on as a moral power. We are discovering too that what we call evil is a perverted good, that the underlying substance is one, and that the supposed antagonism of a positive force is illusory. Lust is destroyed, not by atrophy of a vital power, but by the force of love. And an entire new penology is arising on the basis of the healing and restorative theory of punishment.

We turn, therefore, to the fourth hypothesis, which is that of Whitman himself. We see here the function served by evil, as that which affords the necessary condition of man's spiritual energy. Until reason passed into manifested action the nature of the world was indifferent, but capable of good potentially. The manifestation of reason in man is thus the opening of the gulf between our natural and our spiritual self, between what we are and what we know we ought to be. That gulf must be closed by spiritual action, above all by human love. Our poet therefore believes neither in a pessimism which damps all effort, nor in that kind of optimism which renders effort superfluous. The world is not for him a great prison-house for the captives of the devil, nor will it ever be converted into a glorified Fourieresque millennium. It is and must be, so far as we are concerned, a sphere for human action, the condition of evil being essential to effort, but the eternal sacred influence ultimately enfolding all. The notion of the perpetual pull-devil pull-baker

theory of dualism Whitman could never understand. "Silent and amazed," he tells us, he heard even as a little boy the preacher depicting God "as contending against some being or influence." The divine soul includes all; there is no evil in the city, as the old Bible says, but the Lord hath done it. This conception, identical with that of "Faust," where a man cannot strive without erring, is set forth in the mystic "Chanting the Square Deific," in which the "spirit that denies," defiant, a plotter and wily drudge, together with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are taken as representing the full and completed being of the world—the divine square.

Whitman is thus as firm a believer in religion as he is a rejector of asceticism, and advocate of the body's claims. He finds no conflict between these hitherto conflicting ideas, for the world is one, all forms of energy are combined in one vast synthesis. The old dualism, which doubtless had its historical justification, sundered the natural world from thought and conceived of a distinct entity called God waking up (as in the Greek mythology) from a past eternity of idleness, facing another entity called matter, and fashioning things out of it. But for the modern man the conflict between spirit and matter has ceased. Both are indeed "parts of one stupendous whole;" and only through matter can we rise to the consciousness of spiritual life. The divine power ever manifests itself in Nature, finds its own being reflected back in the world, and "mounting through the spires of form" it emerges in the developed reason of man.

" Was somebody asking to see the soul?
See your own shape and countenance, persons, substances, beasts, the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands.
All hold spiritual joys and afterwards loosen them."[1]

As indicating that Whitman is fully in the current of modern thought it is interesting to note Browning's agreement, as, *e.g.*, in "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

Creation therefore is perpetual, the world-process ever renews itself, the very earth-stuff itself is informed with universal, *i.e.*, divine energy. There are not two worlds, one of which we can know, while the other is unknowable; "the whole fact," as Emerson said, "is here." Heaven and hell are not arbitrary states, externally reared by despotic power: they inhere in the mind, are essential, eternal facts of conscious being—

> "*Nel suoprofondo vidi che s'interna,*
> *Legato con amore in un volume,*
> *Cio che per l'universo si squaderna.*"[2]

A striking epigram of Goethe's is quoted in Henry Crabb Robinson's *Diary*: "If there is not a God now, there will be one day." In the light of modern philosophic ideas the old notion of a "great artificer," painfully elaborated in the dreary mechanical school of Paley (whose platitudes are still thought by the

[1] "*Starting* from Paumanok." Leaves of Grass, p. 25.
[2] *Paradiso.* Canto XXXIII.

University of Cambridge to be an essential part of the education of a young gentleman), who makes things as a workman makes them, is no longer tenable. And any such notion is death to poetry and art. But equally so is the old superficial atheism, a mere empty negation, scorned of the head and heart alike. A greater idea pervades the poetry of both Shelley and Wordsworth, of Tennyson and Browning; an idea vital, dynamic, infinite. The divine realises its aims in the world, and when the human race collectively perceive this, a universal human religion will arise, and the prediction of Goethe will be fulfilled. But this can only come about through human action; and here is where Whitman rivets a link of gold between religion and democracy. The view is not merely speculative; it has its practical side. Evolution is not an external entity which works independent of our volition. We are not only factors in the world-process, but the supremely necessary factors. For God recognises himself in man, even as the mother sees a reflection of her being in the child she has just brought with pain into the world. Thus we cannot look on in selfish isolation, the penalty attached to which is the death of intellect and virtue. Man works for the conversion of the world into a Kosmos, an ordered whole. This is the rationale of progress. This progress may be considered as the identification of the individual with the larger self, so that no man shall desire either to have or to be anything that his fellows may not have or become. This is the principle on which Whitman bases democracy:

"I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms."

When this idea permeates the nature it generates a feeling of brotherhood very different from that condescending pity which a benevolent peer might entertain for a starving needle-woman. It is democratic sympathy, born of the conviction of spiritual solidarity, of the belief that no one can develop his spiritual life apart, but that we are all necessary to one another. It may be doubted whether a single human being on this planet at this moment feels this truth through and through. But to Whitman it is fundamental. He always comes at last to the individual, no doubt. But that individual is a mere undifferentiated potentiality by himself; his spiritual life is only possible through his interaction with the social whole.

What power this conviction gives to a man! We need not wonder at the stories of Whitman's love for even the most degraded, at his pouring out his very life for the wounded soldiers in the War. "I will walk with delinquents with passionate love," he declares. "I feel I am of them, and henceforth I will not deny them—for how can I deny myself?" And, addressing an outcast woman, he exclaims: "Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you; not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you."

In some lines entitled "Thought," [1] when brooding over the fate of a foundered vessel, Whitman hints the sceptical question—

> "Are souls drown'd and destroy'd so?
> Is only matter triumphant?"

But it is a passing hint merely; the whole drift of his ideas tending towards the immortal life of every individual. This is a necessary part of the rational τέλος; and there is no point on which Whitman is more clearly sundered from certain modern schools of thought. The ordinary opponent of the idea of immortality finds his arguments break down before Whitman's faith. For there is in Whitman's mind no faintest trace of "other-worldliness" any more than there is a belief in the vulgar, theological commercialism of rewards and punishments. The immortality of the individual is to him a part of the great order demanded by reason; and he believes it because he trusts in reason. It is born of the suggestions of Nature as truly as of the mind. He thought this globe enough till at night on the prairies "there sprang out so noiseless around me myriads of other globes"; and in like manner the "labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals," whisper delicately of the spiritual individual emerging from the wreck of his fleshly dwelling, eluding the grasp of the destroyer and proceeding through the "superb vistas of death" to "an ampler ether, a diviner air."

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 345.

You shall not look for arguments addressed to the analytic understanding, for "logic and sermons do not convince," but you shall find suggestions of the vast scale on which man's being is laid out, dwarfing all your old conceptions.

"And I have dream'd that the purpose and essence of the known life, the transient,
Is to form and decide identity for the unknown life, the permanent.
If all came but to ashes of dung,
If maggots and rats ended us, then Alarum! for we are betray'd,
Then indeed suspicion of death.
Do you suspect death? if I were to suspect death I should die now;
Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited toward annihilation?

"Pleasantly and well-suited I walk,
Whither I walk I cannot define, but I know it is good,
The whole universe indicates that it is good,
The past and the present indicate that it is good.

. . . . . .

"I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is for it, and the cohering is for it!
And all preparation is for it—and identity is for it—and life and materials are altogether for it!" [1]

Several schools of modern thinkers, or, at least, of those who think they are thinkers, have decided to put immortality on one side, either as a matter of no

[1] "To Think of Time." Leaves of Grass, p. 337.

interest or as a dogma which they deny. To pretend that it is a matter of no interest to us whether death ends everything for us is a piece of utter cant, the veriest make-believe and sham. It is a matter of infinite moment to every human being whether he himself shall escape death or whether it shall destroy him with his present body; momentous to him now and here. Society has for ages been affected by a belief that the true life is not summed up in the material forces of the body; and if that belief is finally abandoned, incalculable will be the effect on men. For at present, so complex and transitional is our civilisation, we cannot be said to have either definitely abandoned or definitely adopted one or the other view. That the belief has been held in a solution of miracle and unverifiable legend is not to the point: the faith itself remains intact.

Some writers appear to think that a faith in the after-life connotes a lack of interest in this world. Whitman would reply that it might as well be contended that a belief in to-morrow will produce lack-lustre slackness to-day. Is it not rather, on the other hand, that we feel the keenest interest in the life of to-day, when we look forward with buoyant confidence to another morn of radiant sunshine, another day crowded with happy activities? A dull, benumbing despair of to-morrow kills our joy in to-day.

"One world at a time," said Thoreau on his death-bed. Certainly; but the very words involved belief in another world, which would be most fully alive and real to those who had lived most deeply in this. It

is the unfortunate and miserable creed—utilitarian in the worst and narrowest sense—of saving one's individual soul from a hell prepared by an angry judge which has so discredited any faith in a beyond as to make it impossible for some persons to disconnect such a faith with "other-worldliness." But there is really no connection whatever between the two. In the thought of Whitman the future life grows as naturally from this as the flower from the seed. And as the seed must be well-conditioned if the flower is to unfold its beauty to the air and sun, so must this life be well-ordered if it is to branch out beyond in the wonder and majesty of immortal strength.

Then there are those who, because of the mercantile theology of a system of rewards for being good and punishments for being bad, reject the desire for immortality as being selfish. Let it be said that there is a great truth underlying the doctrine of rewards and punishments. Nobility is made more noble by its own efforts, while the selfish nature inevitably contracts and loses its perfume. That is a fact of observation, to be tested by anyone. And if the law holds good here, it holds good hereafter, for the real spiritual being is identical. Now is it selfish to desire expansion of character, to seek for ever wider spheres of spiritual influence? On the contrary this is the reverse of selfishness, it is the sure test of a great nature. And if it is so now, at what point does it become the reverse? At the point of a mere physical fact such as death? Why not then at the point of a physical fact like sleep? There is no more

selfishness involved in one's desire for a fuller, nobler life after death than in the desire for a better and more useful life to-morrow after the sleep of to-night. Give us, as Tennyson exclaims, "the reward of going on and not to die."

We have seen that, in Whitman's thought, the world must have a rational τέλος, in the absence of which he thinks spiritual effort to be futile. This τέλος, says a certain school of thought, is Humanity with a large H; not individual spiritual beings, but an abstract conception—mankind, past, present, and to come. For that we are to work. Well, to begin with, we cannot work for past mankind, for it has no objective existence on this theory. We are to work, then, for the present and the future of mankind. Very good; everyone agrees to this, from the devoted fanatical Nihilist who has well-nigh forgotten his very personality in enthusiasm for "the cause" to the equally fanatical revivalist who yearns to save his fellow-men from some awful impending doom. But the question arises, what is mankind? Is it a passing phenomenon destined to perish like the world itself? On the plane of mere physical science there can be but one reply to this question. "The great globe itself, yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve:" that is certain. The latest scientific conclusion is thus expressed: "The doctrine of the 'Dissipation of Energy' forces upon us the conclusion that within a finite period of time past the earth must have been, and within a finite period of time to come must again be, unfit for the habitation of man as at present con-

stituted, unless operations have been, and are to be, performed which are impossible under the laws governing the known operations going on at present in the material world." [1] We may in imagination stretch the future of the planet as far as we please, but it makes no difference; all must come to an end. The planet at the utmost exhibits mere duration of time, and that duration will not endure forever. If, therefore, the destruction of the planet as a place of human abode carries with it the destruction of the human race, then all our effort, our tears, our love, our aspiration, our thoughts "that wander through eternity," our "agony and bloody sweat," our never-ceasing fight for truth and justice, all go for nothing. The stream of human progress ever widening and deepening in the procession of the ages, finally dries up in the arid wastes of time, and is as though it had never been. To work then for a limited humanity bounded by space and time is to work for a perishing world. That is the fact which we must face.

Against this the mere sentimentalism which entwines itself with our past recollections, our hopes and fears, our personal affections, is of no avail. The question for us is whether such a decaying world satisfies the demands of reason. The matter is not to be even approached, much less seriously argued, on any merely personal ground. Many among us are weary enough of the load of life and would gladly lay it

[1] Lord Kelvin (Sir William Thomson) in *Fortnightly Review*, March, 1892.

down without delay. We sympathise with the feeling of Byron when he saw those epitaphs at Ferrara: "*Martini Luigi implora pace. . . . Lucrezia Picini implora eterna quieta.*" We may be the victims of some remote melancholy mysteriously entailed on us, or we may have been foiled in the attainment of our desires or wounded in the house of our friends; we may be the subjects of disease or misfortune or blighted love or a shattered mind. And we may desire nothing more for ourselves than to creep into some dark corner out of the sight of the pitiless sun, and there sink into oblivion. But the problem is not to be solved on the lines of personal desire, but of a rational end; and can we say that such an end is consistent with the effacement of mankind from the vast field of being? Whitman at least thinks that it is not.

Humanity may survive, think some, but individuals must perish. Humanity is an abstraction; there is no humanity apart from individuals. People are perpetually thinking of some ultimate residual essence into which all the forces that have streamed from the countless myriads of the world's individuals shall be gathered up. But there never will be any such essence. Science shows us that mankind cannot live permanently on this planet. Not only so, but the dreams of pretty Utopias of perfect individuals will never be realised here, for the simple reason (if there were no other) that, after the culmination of the earth's physical conditions as a place of human abode has been reached, decline must set in, owing to the

gradual diminution in the stores of solar light and heat, rendering our planet less and less inhabitable, until it is finally encircled by the icy coldness of death. What, too, is reason to say as to the sacrifice of millions of generations to produce this residual essence, itself bound to disappear as soon as reached? Reason demands that every conscious being, while subserving universal ends, shall also be an end in himself, and thus condemns *in toto* the undiluted altruism of the positivist school.

But what if the residual essence be God, the *summum bonum*, the perfect being? Here we leave the ground of positivism and reach that of impersonal pantheism. Are our efforts, our failures, and sorrows, and hopes, all our spiritual animation, ultimately destined to build up, not ourselves, but the being of an impersonal Deity? We cannot say, be it observed, of a world-order; for of that order we are part, and *ex hypothesi* we are excluded. Thus once more we are brought back apparently—if we reject the doctrine that we are ends as well as means—to the old dualism, to a Deity separated from the world-order. We have in the last analysis no place in the latter; we exist merely to subserve the ends of the former, to enable the Divine Being to realise his own life more fully. From our anguish he (or it?) derives the palpitating luxury of a fresh experience; our joys, all unreal to us, the merest gossamer film, work themselves as substantial realities into his nature. It is singular indeed to note how close is this impersonal *pantheism* to the most inhuman Calvinistic specula-

tion. Both sacrifice men to God; one to a jealous, revengeful tyrant, who foreordains according to his own caprice; the other to a vast, formless being. In either case unhappy man remains the helpless victim of an external power. Sharp as a rifle shot we hear Whitman's question:

"What do you suppose Creation is?
What do you suppose will satisfy the soul, except to walk free and own no superior?
What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God?
And that there is no God any more divine than yourself?"[1]

Some who would shrink, perhaps, from the bare assertion that we all live, endure, and suffer, in order to help God to develop his own being or to satisfy his own pleasure, talk vaguely about our living for "the good," and contend that if "the good" triumph we need not trouble about our own individual spirits. Thus in a recent very fervid and eloquent work of noble purpose we read that our efforts here on "this bank and shoal of time" are directed towards the building up of a world-city in which a world-purpose is to be consummated. And then the writer continues: "Do we survive with this good; shall we know in some other state of existence the good we have done in this; shall we meet those for whom we have done, and recognise those whom we love? I know not;

[1] "Laws for Creations." *Leaves of Grass*, p. 299.

and I hold it to be at the best a curious question, albeit one deeply touching these clinging affections that make up so much of the sweetness of human life. The ends of moral perfection are not for our personal satisfaction, but we for them." [1]

Now, what is this "good" which is to survive whether we do or not? Who can, after due reflection, even remotely apprehend the meaning of such an idea? It might be supposed from this that "the good" was a sort of entity, a kind of huge mountain, which we were all piling up, stone by stone, an artificial lake, which we were making with ceaseless contributions from individual buckets. But there is no such thing. It is the agnostic delusion of talking about "deeds" as something final in themselves, whereas the final issue of a deed is its reaction on the character of the individual. It is not the deed that is fixed, and the individual transitory; it is the individual who is rooted in the scheme of things, and the deed which is evanescent. There is no pile, or entity, or particular substance which is "the good," or "the evil" either. What we know of good and evil is in the will. If the will does not survive, then "the good" does not survive, or it survives as inherent in God, whose nature on that hypothesis we have helped to form at the expense of our own selves. Pessimism, which aims at the extinction of will, is an intelligible creed. But this theory of a "good" surviving, while the will in which alone "the good" can be realised is

[1] *Ethical Religion*, by W. M. Salter. (Boston, 1889.)

destroyed, is absolutely unintelligible, unless it applies to a God who lives through our death—in which case it becomes grossly immoral. How is it possible to base a theory of progress on an illusion or an injustice? Whitman rejects both for the doctrine of the eternity of the individual soul:

"You are not thrown to the winds; you gather certainly
and safely around yourself;
Yourself! yourself! yourself for ever and ever!"[1]

There is no possibility of coping with Whitman on other than a ground of pessimism. We may of course refuse, as most perhaps do, to throw our weight into the scale on either side. We may ignore the matter for a time, or we may to the last maintain an attitude of doubt, honestly unable to come to any conclusion on this, the most momentous of issues. But no agnostic doctrine of "meliorism," no positivist phrase-mongering about "subjective immortality," will deceive any eager and determined soul. Some persons angrily exclaim against Dante for consigning Epicurus to hell because he taught that the soul dies with the body. Such persons do not understand that Dante does not arbitrarily consign anyone to either hell, purgatory, or paradise. He simply finds them there. Each is in one or the other state because he is such or such a person. The man who denies his own spiritual nature, Dante would say, is in hell, and could not be anywhere else. The whole question resolves itself into

[1] *Leaves of Grass*, p. 335.

this: On what scale is our being constructed? The growing, expanding religious consciousness of the world has found in man an incarnation of the divine, and the object of his being is that he "might be a partaker of the divine nature." If we do not believe that, if we positively deny it, then we are at issue with the religious consciousness, and must accept the pessimist position. We shall not, in that event, it is true, fall into a vulgar materialism, for no materialist position to-day is tenable for one instant. We shall by no means assume that death ends all with us; indeed, the "something after death" may become for us, on a pessimistic hypothesis, a very terrible apprehension. We can only escape from an inherently evil world by cessation of activity, by all suppression of desire, and it may take many æons to reach that goal. But we shall have certainly abandoned the belief in a rational end, in which, as rational beings, we share. We shall not as pessimists sacrifice ourselves on the altar of a jealous God, or contribute of our substance to build up the nature of a being whose delight involves our pain, whose life necessitates our death. We shall simply consume to nothingness in the vast echoless temple of the Universal Silence.

For many of us, children of this age of strife, and with the dim, veiled phantoms of unknown forms looming up before us and filling our minds with apprehension, while we perceive the outlines of the past being more and more obliterated every day, there will be nothing but perpetual scepticism, leading to paralysis of the will, and to the frittering of our energies on

the tasks which do not involve for their accomplishment a supremely great and undying purpose. The many will, it is to be feared, lead lives of mechanical drudgery, toiling hard for the bread that perisheth, for a long while yet to come. But every change for the better in the condition of labour, affording greater leisure and enjoyment, will have an effect the reverse of that which materialistic atheism vainly imagines. As the world becomes more enjoyable, men will be more loath "to leave the warm precincts of the cheerful day;" as life becomes sweeter it will be more highly valued. And then it will be for the masses a question of pessimism or a new religion. For if they are convinced that there is no ultimate good in which they share, no rational end in which they are partakers, but that the Kingdom of Heaven is, after all, really nothing but "meat and drink," we may be sure that their pessimism will not be of the dilettante kind toyed with by some literary persons, but a most serious, practical matter, with tragic consequences more momentous to this world than any yet recorded. What is to be said to these swarming millions of earnest toilers about the themes they will discuss in a new and infinitely more vital fashion than conventional religionism knows? The question cannot be argued here. Whitman's final answer, however, can be given; it is the swan-song of the "good gray poet," and may serve as the requiem music for his departed soul. It is entitled:

DEATH'S VALLEY.[1]

" Nay, do not dream, designer dark,
Thou hast pourtrayed or hit thy theme entire :
I, hoverer of late by this dark valley, by its confines, having glimpses of it,
Here enter lists with thee, claiming my right to make a symbol too.

" For I have seen many wounded soldiers die
After dread suffering—have seen their lives pass off with smiles ;
And I have watched the death-hours of the old : and seen the infant die ;
The rich, with all his nurses and his doctors ;
And then the poor, in meagreness and poverty ;
And I myself for long, O Death, have breathed my every breath
Amid the nearness and the silent thought of thee.

" And out of these and thee
I make a scene, a song, brief (not fear of thee,
Nor gloom's ravines, nor bleak, nor dark—for I do not fear thee,
Nor celebrate the struggle, or contortion, or hard-tied knot),
Of the broad blessed light and perfect air, with meadows, rippling tides, and trees and flowers and grass,
And the low hum of living breeze—and in the midst God's beautiful eternal right hand,

[1] *Harper's Monthly* Magazine, April, 1892.

Thee, holiest minister of Heaven—thee, envoy, usherer,
guide at last of all,
Rich, florid, loosener of the stricture-knot call'd life,
Sweet, peaceful, welcome Death."

THE END.

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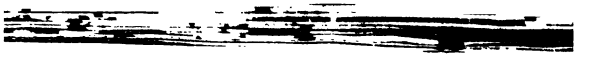

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